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POETRY AND ACTION IN  
BYRON'S DEVELOPMENT

by


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Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

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March, 1983

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### ABSTRACT

of action This thesis concerns the conflict between Byron the poet and Byron the man in so far as such a study illuminates the poetry. The aim has been to trace this conflict as it developed in Byron's work, in terms of a discourse between what he himself regarded as the spectator role of the poet and the participatory role of the man of action. The study therefore concentrates on those poems and materials that illustrate the tension between the poet and the man, and reflect Byron's movement from poetry to action.

The first chapter outlines the argument of the subsequent discussion and provides certain relevant biographical details as a background to it. Hence we move from Byron's early poetic expressions of his desire for fame and action, through his critical observations on poetry and action, his parliamentary schemes and his attitude towards Napoleon, to his engagement in the Italian uprising and, finally, to his active commitment to the Greek War of Independence. Each succeeding chapter seeks to formulate more cogently the principal issues that arise in this first chapter.

Chapter 2 discusses Byron's interest and performance in the House of Lords. His speeches, which have met with little critical scrutiny, are considered both as pieces of oratory and as an effort by Byron to engage seriously and actively with English politics.

The third chapter analyses Byron's attitude towards Napoleon as the archetype of the contemporary man of action. In particular, a sustained critique is offered of the Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte and the Napoleon poems of 1815, since none of these has received due critical attention.

Chapter 4 studies closely three crucial texts: The Prisoner of Chillon, The Lament of Tasso and The Prophecy of Dante. These are considered as a sequence, as an extended meditation on the theme of mental imprisonment, in order to reflect Byron's coming to terms with himself and his emergence from poetry to action.

The final chapter continues this progression, resuming a polarity sketched in the first chapter between the world of poetry and the world of action. The aim here has been to re-iterate the tension between the poet and the man, in order to secure more forcefully the argument that the poem 'On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year', of which a new MS reading makes a material difference to its interpretation, is a poem of choice: the poetic endorsement of Byron's commitment to action.

Marchand's complete edition of Byron's Letters and Journals has been used throughout, as have, wherever possible, the first three volumes of McGann's new edition of The Complete Poetical Works.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT TITLES

- PW.            Lord Byron. The Complete Poetical Works. Edited by  
Jerome J. McGann. 3 vols. Oxford University Press,  
1980-81. (Publication continuing).
- Poetry        The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry. Edited by Ernest  
Hartley Coleridge. 7 vols. London: John Murray,  
1898-1904.
- LJ.            Byron's Letters and Journals. Edited by Leslie A. Marchand.  
12 vols. London: John Murray, 1973-1982.
- Prothero.     The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals. Edited  
by Rowland E. Prothero. 6 vols. London: John  
Murray, 1898-1901.
- Moore.        The Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of  
His Life. Thomas Moore. New and Revised Edition.  
London: Chatto and Windus, 1875.
- Marchand.    Byron: A Biography. Leslie A. Marchand. 3 vols.  
London: John Murray, 1957.
- CHP           Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, to be found in PW. II.
- DJ.            Don Juan. Taken from Lord Byron: Don Juan. Edited by  
T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan and W. W. Pratt,  
Harmondsworth, 1977.

### INTRODUCTION

'I am really wretched with the perpetual conflict with myself.'<sup>1</sup>

Byron's sense of 'conflict' with himself assumed a variety of guises. This thesis is an attempt to explore some aspects of one major form of this conflict: that between Byron the poet and Byron the man of action, in so far as such a study illuminates the poetry.

The significance of this question has been acknowledged by some of the best Byron critics of this century. The present thesis is indebted to this earlier work, more particularly to that of Andrew Rutherford, Robert Gleckner and Jerome McGann.<sup>2</sup> However, there exists no study of any length which has made this particular conflict its principal concern.

My aim has been to trace this conflict as it developed in Byron's work as a dialogue between what he early regarded as the spectator role of the poet and the participatory role of the man of action. The study therefore concentrates on those poems that illustrate the tension between the poet and the man, and reflect Byron's movement from poetry to action.

For the understanding of this development a new reading in the MS of the poem 'On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year',<sup>3</sup> which is the centre-piece of the final chapter, is crucial.

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1. To Lady Melbourne, October 17, 1813, LI, III, 147.

2. Andrew Rutherford. Byron: A Critical Study. (Stanford, 1961); Robert F. Gleckner. Byron and the Ruins of Paradise (Baltimore, 1967); Jerome J. McGann. Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development (Chicago, 1968). See also, William H. Marshall. The Structure of Byron's Major Poems. (Philadelphia, 1962); M.K. Joseph. Byron the Poet. (London, 1964); J. D. Jump. Byron. (London, 1972); Bernard Blackstone. Byron: A Survey. (London, 1975); Jerome J. McGann. Don Juan in Context. (London, 1976).

3. Hereinafter referred to as 'On this Day'.

### INTRODUCTION

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  3. Hereinafter referred to as 'On this Day'.

The present study closes with a discussion of 'On this Day', arguing that the poem, which this new reading serves to emphasize, can be regarded as the poetic endorsement of Byron's voluntary commitment to action in the Greek War of Independence.

Biographical material is used only to shed light on the poetry. With this in mind, the intention of the first chapter has been to outline the argument of the subsequent study and to provide certain biographical details as a background to it. Hence we move from Byron's early poetic expressions of his desire for fame and action, through his critical observations on poetry and action, his parliamentary schemes and his consideration of Napoleon, to his participation in the Italian uprising, and finally to his commitment and conduct in Greece. The chapter thus follows in a more detailed form the development from the poet to the man, poetry to action, and **prefigures** the scope of the thesis as a whole. Each succeeding chapter seeks to underpin in turn the salient issues raised in this first chapter.

Of immediate relevance in this matter is the fact that Byron is the only major poet who held an inherited position in the British Constitution. His consciousness of his status leads to the discussion in chapter 2 of his interest and performance in the House of Lords. This is regarded as his first attempt at a participatory role. In his biography of Byron, Professor Marchand has cited passages from his speeches and has commented on them very shrewdly; and I hope I have acknowledged him where appropriate.<sup>1</sup> But in

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1. Marchand, I, pp. 318/324 and 344/346.

fact, scarcely anything appears to have been done on the speeches as pieces of oratory or as an effort by Byron to engage seriously and actively with English politics. In this chapter naturally enough, the principal materials are the texts of the speeches themselves; and I have tried to deal with each in an appropriate manner.

Chapters 3 and 4 depend almost exclusively upon a close reading of certain poems. As a member of the British aristocracy at perhaps the most crucial period in its history, Byron's attitude towards Napoleon, as the modern counterpart of the historical man of action, is significantly revealing. This is the concern of chapter 3. That Byron's attitude is ambivalent is indisputable and has been noted by many critics. M. K. Joseph, for instance, sees Napoleon presented as 'a paradoxical figure, a fallen hero with yet a touch of the buffoon, a liberator turned tyrant, in whom human greatness and littleness are both magnified'.<sup>1</sup> On a different score, Robert Gleckner suggests that 'Napoleon fallen is merely Harold, the poet, or man in another guise',<sup>2</sup> while Andrew Rutherford writes that Byron 'avoids crudely identifying' Napoleon with himself, 'and though he still admires Napoleon, he does not attempt to minimise his weaknesses'.<sup>3</sup> I find both these standpoints highly sympathetic. But, in the present context, I feel that Napoleon is rather more what McGann calls 'a figural self-projection of B himself'.<sup>4</sup> That is, Napoleon is a mirror-image in whom Byron sees himself reflected, but to whom he feels himself morally superior. This will be argued more cogently in the third chapter, which also seeks to bring Byron's ambivalent attitude towards Napoleon into firmer relief. For, while Byron's treatment of him in Childe Harold III has received much critical attention, his other poems directly

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1. Byron the Poet, p. 96.
  2. Gleckner, *op.cit.*, p. 247.
  3. Rutherford, *op.cit.*, p. 58.
  4. PW, III, 473.

concerned with Napoleon have been noticeably neglected. In the case of the Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte for instance,<sup>1</sup> McGann has pointed out that 'Critical commentary on the poem has been curiously scant'.<sup>2</sup> This is true, although Wilson Knight, Robert Gleckner and, more recently, James Hogg have made some enlightening references to it.<sup>3</sup> A sustained criticism of the whole Ode however, and of the Napoleon poems of 1815, does not appear to have been broached hitherto, and this I have tried to remedy.

Byron's education and background made it inevitable that he should see his own position against a historical backdrop. It was natural that he should have associated himself with Tasso and Dante 'who were brave and active citizens' besides being men of letters.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 4 therefore, discusses The Prisoner of Chillon, The Lament of Tasso and The Prophecy of Dante. I have considered these poems as a sequence - as a prolonged meditation on the theme of mental torture and imprisonment. In so doing I have been aware of the sensitive analyses of The Prisoner of Chillon conducted by Andrew Rutherford, Robert Gleckner and Jerome McGann.<sup>5</sup> The object has not been to dispute or discredit their invaluable discussions, but to offer a supplementary interpretation which is indebted to theirs. As I have attempted to avoid critical dialogue within the body of the thesis, I should like to clarify my position here.

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1. Hereinafter referred to as the Ode.
  2. PW. III, 457.
  3. G. Wilson Knight. Lord Byron: Christian Virtues (London, 1952), pp. 238/240; Gleckner, op.cit., pp. 223/224; James Hogg. 'Byron's Vacillating Attitude Towards Napoleon.' Byron: Poetry and Politics. Edited by Edwin A. Stürzl and James Hogg (Salzburg, 1981), pp. 397/400.
  4. LJ. III, 221.
  5. Rutherford, op.cit., pp. 66/75; Gleckner, op.cit., pp. 191/202; McGann, Fiery Dust, pp. 165/173.

Robert Gleckner's construction of Bonnivard's world, 'of his death in life, of his universe of three graves', closely follows that of Andrew Rutherford to whom Chillon represents 'the terrible negation of vitality', 'a living grave', a 'death in life';<sup>1</sup> while McGann concludes that 'Bonnivard is reluctant to regain his freedom, for by coming to live in the sun he is forced always to see around him the life that he no longer has'.<sup>2</sup> Although in principle I share these views, my own emphasis is perhaps rather more extreme. It is more optimistic than Rutherford's and Gleckner's, in so far as I regard the poem as a process of the mind coming to terms with itself. It is more imperative than McGann's, since I argue that however 'reluctant' Bonnivard might be, he must learn to face up to the fact of that 'life that he no longer has' and re-engage with the world.

It is from this platform that The Lament of Tasso is considered. Although this poem has received critical side-glances, it does not appear to have invited a detailed analysis.<sup>3</sup> Bernard Blackstone has given it some interesting consideration, but has concentrated rather more on the rhetorical structures in its earlier lines, than on the theme of the 'castaway'.<sup>4</sup> I have regarded the poem as the futile attempt of the self-engrossed poet to re-engage with life. That is, following on from The Prisoner of Chillon, Tasso reaches a poetical cul-de-sac in Bonnivard's 'wider prison',<sup>5</sup> entrenching the poet deeper in his mental imprisonment.

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1. Gleckner, op.cit., p. 198; Rutherford, op.cit., pp. 69 and 71.
  2. Fiery Dust, p. 172.
  3. For example McGann, Fiery Dust, pp. 168/169.
  4. Byron: A Survey, pp. 170/173.
  5. The Prisoner of Chillon, 323.

If, as I argue, The Lament of Tasso is Byron's Inferno, then The Prophecy of Dante can be seen as his Purgatorio. However, critical opinion is at odds here. Bernard Blackstone regards the poet of this poem as 'Byron in his worst, his self-pitying, world-cursing persona'. but limits his argument to a discussion of the first Canto only.<sup>1</sup> Robert Gleckner, on the other hand, sees it as 'pre-eminently a political poem' which is also an embodiment of 'the agonizing battle of man within his own heart and mind' for coherence in the midst of 'a fragmented and meaningless universe'.<sup>2</sup> Chester Mills, whose discussion I have found highly sympathetic to my own, also sees the poem as political while reflecting 'an internal struggle by the author to reconcile himself to his self-imposed exile'.<sup>3</sup> My own argument combines the political aspect with that of self-reconciliation. That is, in The Prophecy of Dante, we see the poet emerging from his mental imprisonment and re-engaging with the world through the political use, as opposed to the self-reflective use, of the Word.

Which brings us to the final chapter. At the close of chapter 4 it is suggested that Byron only achieves a relative redemption from his conflict with self, because writing politically is not the same as doing politically. Chapter 5 seeks to underpin this point by categorizing two worlds of experience that can be delineated in Byron's poetry. These are depicted, not arbitrarily, as a world of pleasure and a world of action. This reflects and subsumes a similar depiction in the first chapter between the withdrawn world of the poet and the social world of the man of action. After a more general survey, a close analysis is made of the poem 'On this Day'. This has received very

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1. Byron: A Survey, pp. 173/175.
  2. Gleckner, *op.cit.*, p. 312.
  3. Chester H. Mills. 'The Prophecy of Dante,' The Byron Journal. No. 8. (1980), p. 52.



little critical notice, except from Bernard Blackstone who regards the poem as 'all wrong' and much worse.<sup>1</sup> While his objection to 'clichés' and the absence of 'humour' is understandable, I cannot agree with his estimate of the 'limp defeatism of this last poem'.<sup>2</sup> I feel Blackstone is nearer the truth of the poem and of Byron when he states that 'War and love, his old antitheses, engage in a final tussle here'.<sup>3</sup> It is this 'tussle' I endeavour to expose. I argue that it is a poem of choice, underscoring Byron's resolute commitment to action.

I should like to thank Jerome J. McLann for his various communications to me, which are noted in the Bibliography; and Dr. Malcolm Hardman and J. Drummond Bone for their supervision and encouragement. My thanks are also due to Mrs. Ann Kelly for kindly typing this thesis.

Note.

While the conflict between Byron the poet and Byron the man of action emerges periodically in Childe Harold and Don Juan, neither work has been discussed in its entirety (although reference has been made to certain relevant passages from both). The reason for this is that I wished to concentrate on specific poems in which this conflict can be seen as thematically integral to the subject of each as a whole.

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1. Byron: A Survey, pp. 166/169.
  2. Ibid., p. 167.
  3. Ibid., p. 169.

## CHAPTER 1

### POETRY AND ACTION

'Nothing so fretful, so despicable as a Scribbler'.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between Byron the poet and Byron the man is an uneasy one. Byron was never content to regard himself, nor to be regarded by others, merely as a poet. Neither did he rate the role of poet very highly. In his view, poetry was something outside or collateral to the main field of activity in a man's life: it was 'an art, or an attribute, and not a profession'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as he states in his Preface to Hours of Idleness<sup>3</sup> - a significant title in the present context, and as he was later to insist both to Annabella and to Moore, poetry was not his 'vocation'.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, he felt that he was destined to fulfil some responsible role in the practical affairs of life. This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the entries made in his Journal for 1813/14, which he kept at the height of his social and poetic prestige. Throughout its pages he reveals how deeply dissatisfied he is with his aimless and inactive existence. 'At five-and-twenty, when the better part of life is over, one should be something:- and what am I? nothing but five-and-twenty'.<sup>5</sup> And again, 'My restlessness tells me I have something within that "passeth show";'<sup>6</sup> yet he is only too aware that he is neither exploiting nor justifying such a presentiment: his 'idleness is troublesome',<sup>7</sup> he is frittering his life away,<sup>8</sup> he should have a proper 'pursuit' or 'employment',<sup>9</sup> and most significantly of all, 'I might and should have been a Pasha by this time'.<sup>10</sup> It becomes clear then, that despite his social and poetic activities

1. Byron to Augusta, September 2, 1811, LJ. II, 88.
2. To Moore, June 1, 1818, LJ. VI, 47.
3. (1807), PW. I, 33.
4. To Annabella Milbanke, September 26, 1814, LJ. IV, 183; to Moore, February 28, 1817, LJ. V, 177.
5. LJ. III, 204.
6. LJ. III, 225.
7. LJ. III, 243.
8. LJ. III, 237.
9. LJ. III, 254, 256.
10. LJ. III, 246.

and his eminence in both fields, Byron the man yearned for some occupation which Byron the poet failed to provide. And the sort of position he envisaged for himself was that of 'Pasha': a governor, a leader, a politically active role.

An early instance of this conflict between Byron the poet and Byron the man, together with the implications concerning poetry and action arising from it, can be seen in the following passage from 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher' (1806), which was written during his minority and published only in the privately printed Poems on Various Occasions.<sup>1</sup>

Dear Becher, you tell me, to mix with mankind,  
I cannot deny such a precept is wise;  
But, retirement accords with the tone of my mind,  
I will not descend to a world I despise. 1

Did the Senate, or Camp, my exertions require,  
Ambition might prompt me, at once, to go forth;  
When infancy's years of probation expire,  
Perchance, I may strive to distinguish my birth. 2

Oh! such the desire, in my bosom, for fame,  
Bids me live, but to hope for posterity's praise ... 4

For the life of a FOX, of a CHATHAM the death,  
What censure, what danger, what woe would I brave?  
Their lives did not end, when they yielded their breath,  
Their glory illumines the gloom of the grave.<sup>2</sup> 5

Despite the absence of any direct allusion to poetry as such, in these lines or elsewhere throughout the poem's nine stanzas, the tension between the poet and the man, poetry and action, is implicit here - particularly in the first two stanzas. At once we are presented with two very different and conflicting worlds of experience: one of 'retirement', and one of 'Ambition'. The first is characterized as an anti-social and aloof world in which the individual takes refuge from 'mankind' in his own 'mind': the rhyme 'mankind'/'mind' serves as a fine and emphatic contrast, while 'descend' and 'despise' suggest the sense of mental superiority the poet feels in this world. In

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1. 1807; see PW. 1, 384.

2. PW. 1. 178.

addition, as lines 3/4 of stanza 2 indicate, there is an implicit relationship between this withdrawn world and immaturity ('infancy's years'). As Byron himself put it in a letter of this period, 'the poet yields to the Orator, but as nothing can be done in the latter Capacity till the expiration of my minority, the former occupies my present Attention'.<sup>1</sup> Hence the withdrawal from 'mankind' and the writing of poetry appears to be an interim measure which 'occupies' the poet until there is something for him to do in the world of 'Ambition'. It is also worth noting that the form in which the poem is couched is a verse-epistle: this seems to emphasize the association between this world of 'retirement' and writing poetry, since the address draws attention to itself as poetry.

The world of 'Ambition', however, is immediately characterized as dynamic and outgoing, and the language itself serves to distinguish this world from that of 'retirement': 'exertions', 'prompt me', 'to go forth', 'strive', 'brave'. Here Byron embraces the world from which he had formerly retreated, envisaging himself as participating in it in the specific role of either politician or soldier ('the Senate, or Camp'). And it is only in such a role and in active public life that he will be able to achieve true 'fame' or 'glory' ('posterity's praise', and lines 3/4 of stanza 5; the idea of posthumous, enduring 'fame' is operative). Although we should be wary of some of Byron's obiter dicta, it seems fair to take seriously his comment to William Banks at this time: 'poetic fame is by no means the "acme" of my Wishes'.<sup>2</sup> Since Byron mentions no military heroes throughout the poem, but devotes a whole stanza to two eminent orators, it is reasonable to deduce that his preferred choice of action is 'the Senate',<sup>3</sup> and his activities in the House of Lords will be the subject of the next chapter.

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1. To John Hanson, April 2, 1807, LJ. 1, 113.

2. March 6, 1807, LJ. 1, 112.

3. See also, his letter to Edward Noel Long, May 1, 1807, LJ. 1, 117/118.

The profusion of the first person singular, which persists in the remainder of the poem, indicates an egoistical and selfish attitude towards both the worlds delineated here: he chooses 'retirement' because it 'accords with the tone of [his] mind'; he would 'go forth' into the world of 'the Senate, or Camp' because 'Ambition' and 'the desire ... for fame' would 'prompt' him to do so. This selfish motivation is an important point to note at this juncture, since, as I hope to show (particularly in the last two chapters), it proves an obstacle to committed action.

Yet, even here, there is the suggestion that Byron recognizes obligations to something outside himself: 'Perchance, I may strive to distinguish my birth' (*italics added*). The word 'birth' has been emphasized because it suggests something lineal and not merely personal. Byron himself may indeed have 'Ambition' and 'the desire ... for fame', but these are inextricably bound up with a sense of heredity. He feels responsible to the name he bears, and must add lustre to the line he represents. To a certain extent then, this sense of obligation depersonalizes his private desire for fame: in order to prove himself worthy of his 'birth' he must himself distinguish it, make his personal contribution to it. A revealing line from stanza 8 of the poem, will help to clarify the issue: 'To me what is title? the phantom of power'. That is to say, the 'title' as inherited by Byron remains merely a 'phantom of power' (*italics added*), until he himself invests it with power - until he gives substance to that power to which his 'title' pretends. In other words, he may be the (present) 'Lord Byron', but he cannot claim the merit of being so until he makes himself 'Lord' Byron.

Other poems of this early period, of course, express similar sentiments of this desire to contribute to the glory of his line: the final three stanzas of 'On Leaving Newstead Abbey' (1803), for instance, and the poem 'A Fragment' ('When, to their airy hall, my fathers' voice' [1803]), and, less directly, 'The Episode of Nisus and Euryalus' (1807), which is the prototype of the

Turkish tales.<sup>1</sup> But these poems do not suggest the tensions we are dealing with here. Nonetheless, a similar pattern with a different emphasis can be seen emerging in 'Translation from Anacreon. To His Lyre'. This is a translation of Anacreontea. Ode 1, drafted in 1805 or 1806, and published in Hours of Idleness.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to the present writer, Professor McGann suggests that 'On This Day I Complete My Thirty Sixth Year' (1824), 'seems to echo deliberately the Anacreon Ode I which B had translated years before - - echoes it to invert it, and to choose martial glory instead of love'.<sup>3</sup> Since the final chapter is built around the poem 'On This Day', it seems appropriate, in the light of McGann's comment, that Byron's translation of the Anacreon Ode 1 should be considered in this chapter, in order to underscore the thematic link between this chapter and the last.

I wish to tune my quivering lyre,  
To deeds of fame, and notes of fire;  
To echo from its rising swell,  
How heroes fought, and nations fell;  
When Atreus' sons advanc'd to war,  
Or Tyrian Cadmus rov'd afar;  
But still, to martial strains unknown,  
My lyre recurs to love alone,  
Fir'd with the hope of future fame,  
I seek some nobler hero's name;  
The dying chords are strung anew,  
To war, to war, my harp is due;  
With glowing strings, the epic strain,  
To Jove's great son I raise again,  
Alcides, and his glorious deeds,  
Beneath whose arm the Hydra bleeds;  
All, all in vain, my wayward lyre,  
Wakes silver notes of soft desire.  
Adieu ye chiefs, renown'd in arms,  
Adieu the clang of war's alarms.  
To other deeds my soul is strung,  
And sweeter notes shall now be sung;  
My harp shall all its powers reveal,  
To tell the tale my heart must feel,  
Love, love alone, my lyre shall claim,  
In songs of bliss, and sighs of flame.

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1. All of which poems were published in Hours of Idleness, 1807.
  2. PW. 1, 370.
  3. Letter received from J. J. McGann, 24 May 1977.

The tension is finely created here between the struggle to write in the Dorian mode, yet the continual recurrence to the Lydian mode. Notice how the first seven lines build up towards writing in the epic vein of 'deeds' of valour, only to be undercut by the eighth line in which his 'lyre recurs to love alone'. So also with lines 9/16, the strain of which is immediately released by the subsequent couplet. And the difference between the two modes is underscored by the verbal texture: all the energetic verbs and weighty adjectives and nouns are reserved for the 'martial strains'; while the absence of forceful verbs and the effeminate and light-weight words reflect the nature of the 'love' world of which the poet sings ('silver notes of soft desire', 'songs of bliss, and sighs of flame'. This is perhaps emphasized by an alternative MS reading for lines 23/24: 'Be mine the softer, sweeter Care,/To soothe the young; and virgin Fair'.<sup>1</sup> The poet attempts to reach out to the masculine world of action, but is forced back into the inferior, effeminate world of inner creativity. Line 24 is revealing in this instance: his heart 'must' feel in order to 'tell the tale'.<sup>2</sup> The 'must' is imperative; but since the poet is without the experience of the active world, his attempt to write about it is fruitless. Unfit for such a task, he repudiates it and opts for the withdrawn world of poetry and love. Even the form of the poem, with every line end-stopped and the short tetrameter couplets, captures the withdrawal of this poetic world, and suggests that the poet is entrapped in it. Notice again that, as with the poem 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher', the poet's desire for fame is selfishly motivated: he wishes to exploit the theme of action in 'the hope of future fame' (line 9). Whether the poet actually chooses to write on the lesser subject of love is questionable. For his lyre is 'wayward' and seems to have control over him rather than the other way about. Hence 'deeds' in

1. PW. 1, 73.

2. Cf. Hints from Horace, 141/142: 'The poet claims our tears - but, by his leave,/Before I shed them, let me see him grieve.'

line 21 is used ironically in contrast to the 'deeds' of line 2 and 15, while the claim in line 23, 'My harp shall all its powers reveal', in effect indicates the limitation of the poet's powers which are confined to the Lydian mode only.

In his 'Adieu to the Muse', written in 1807 but unpublished until 1832,<sup>1</sup> Byron draws together many of the themes that have arisen so far: poetry, the 'offspring of Fancy', is expressly associated with 'infancy's days' and the 'feelings of childhood' (stanzas 1 and 2); while he can no longer 'sing of Love' (stanza 5), because 'early affection and love is o'ercastr' (stanza 9); that is, he cannot sing about what he no longer experiences. Nor can he sing of the glories of action:

Can I sing of the deeds which my Fathers have done,  
And raise my loud harp to the fame of my Sires?  
For glories like theirs, oh, how faint is my tone!  
For Heroes' exploits how unequal my fires!

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This underscores the similar inability described in the above translation of the Anacreon Ode 1, but it goes further than this. For it suggests the incapacity of the Word to match up to the 'glories' of action: the poet recognizes that to sing of glory is not in itself glorious, as his art cannot encompass the deed. Hence his deliberate rejection of the Muse, and in a choice of metre (anapaestic), that seems to reflect the trivial nature of his art and the scorn he feels for its circumscribed powers.

The tensions delineated in these juvenile poems in skeletal form, are given far more urgent expression by Byron in his maturity. In his Journal for 1813/14, having just sketched his 'Gradus ad Parnassum' - with Scott at the top, Rogers second, Moore and Campbell third - Byron goes on to say:

I can sincerely say that I am not very much alive now to criticism. But - in tracing this - I rather believe that it proceeds from my not attaching that importance to authorship which many do, and which, when young, I did also. ... I do think the preference of writers

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1. PW. 1. 388.



to agents - the mighty stir made about scribbling and scribes, by themselves and others - a sign of effeminacy, degeneracy, and weakness. Who would write who had any thing better to do? "Action - action - action" - said Demosthenes: "Actions - actions," I say, and not writing - least of all, rhyme. Look at the querulous and monotonous lives of the "genus," - except Cervantes, Tasso, Dante, Ariosto, Kleist (who were brave and active citizens), Aeschylus, Sophocles, and some other of the antiques also - what a worthless, idle brood it is!<sup>1</sup>

The position is put cogently and clearly here. 'Scribbler'<sup>2</sup>,

, 'scribes' and 'scribbling' are derogatory terms used consistently by Byron to express his contempt for poetry and poets; and this is not simply a matter of aristocratic abuse. As is evident from the passage, writing is regarded as something secondary and inferior to a man's active role in life. Byron's own exceptions from the "genus" prove his rule: in addition to being writers, they were above all 'brave and active citizens'. This is the salient point; they participated in real life. Writers, on the other hand, as mere writers, or 'poets merely as poets',<sup>3</sup> are regarded as indolent ciphers on life: 'querulous', 'monotonous', 'worthless', 'idle' - the words themselves convey the negative, mean and pedestrian character and life of such men, and the scorn that Byron feels for them. But action is not only morally superior to writing, it is also the proper sphere in which a man should seek a pursuit. This is made clear by Byron's criticism of the 'preference of writers to agents' as being a sign of 'effeminacy, degeneracy, and weakness'. He is speaking of men, and men should be 'agents'. When they turn aside from their native active role in life and exalt writing above it, they degenerate into the 'weakness' of 'effeminacy'. More succinctly, such a preference indicates social moral decay because the masculine virtues of doing and participation are relegated to a 'secondary consideration'; life gives way to abstraction, masculine kinesis to feminine stasis, activity to mere looking on:

1. LJ. III, 220/221.
2. Byron to Augusta, September 2, 1811, LJ. II, 88.
3. Byron to Annabella, September 26, 1814, LJ. IV, 183.

no one should be a rhymers who could be any thing better. And this is what annoys one, to see Scott and Moore, and Campbell and Rogers, who might have all been agents and leaders, now mere spectators. For, though they may have other ostensible avocations, these last are reduced to a secondary consideration.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his admiration for these poets as poets, which can be seen from his 'Gradus ad Parnassum' referred to above, Byron deplores what he regards as their failure to exploit such potential they have for being 'brave and active citizens'. By giving priority to literature rather than to life, by remaining 'rhymers' when they have the ability to be 'agents and leaders', they reject their true masculine role and so exemplify the 'degeneracy' of which he speaks. As 'spectators' they may perhaps serve as commentators on life, but they do not actively serve to promote it. Byron is criticizing here the very position we saw him defending in the first stanza of 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher'. Poetry constitutes a withdrawal from, not a commitment to, real living experience; and a man's responsibility lies in his commitment. These points are amplified in a later Journal entry concerning the orator William Windham:

Windham - the first in one department of oratory and talent, whose only fault was his refinement beyond the intellect of half his hearers, - Windham, half his life an active participator in the events of the earth, and one of those who governed nations, - he regretted, - and dwelt much on that regret, that "he had not entirely devoted himself to literature and science!!!" His mind certainly would have carried him to eminence there, as elsewhere; - but I cannot comprehend what debility of that mind could suggest such a wish. ... What! would he have been a plodder? a metaphysician? - perhaps a rhymers? a scribbler? Such an exchange must have been suggested by illness.<sup>2</sup>

The sincerity of Byron's astonishment at Windham's 'regret' is amply conveyed by the movement of this passage. The building up of what Byron regards as the real merits of Windham (prefaced each time by 'Windham', to give stature to the man and to underline his own incredulity); his delaying the climax, the actual citation of Windham's 'regret', and refining it with his own exclamation-marks; then diminishing into his familiar terms of contempt -

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1. LJ. III, 217.

2. LJ. III, 219.

not of Windham, but of the alternative role he would have preferred, 'plodder', 'metaphysician', 'rhymers', 'scribbler'; and concluding with the only plausible explanation he can imagine to account for such a volte-face, 'illness'. It is a finely balanced piece of prose firmly expressing Byron's amazement and indicating where his true admiration lies. For, here we have in the phrase 'an active participator in the events of the earth, and one of those who governed nations', the perfect antithesis to the idea of the 'spectator' poet. The one does, the other merely observes. The 'participator' is engaged in the directing of history and human destiny, employing his talents to organize the affairs of mankind. His theatre is the 'earth' and he governs 'nations', both of which words suggest a breadth of vision and experience lacking in the 'spectator' poet. Indeed, the mental impoverishment of the poet is implicit in the words 'debility' and 'illness' as well as the four scornful terms Byron uses to characterize him: his is a diseased, abstracting and sluggish intellect of circumscribed vision and energy. The following passage from a letter to Annabella at this time, has direct bearing on these issues:

I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect - this may look like Affectation - but it is my real opinion - it is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earth-quake - they say Poets never or rarely go mad ... but are generally so near it - that I cannot help thinking rhyme is so far useful in anticipating & preventing the disorder. - I prefer the talents of action - of war - or the Senate - or even of Science - to all the speculations of these mere dreamers of another existence (I don't mean religiously but fancifully) and spectators of this. - - Apathy - disgust - & perhaps incapacity have rendered me now a mere spectator - but I have occasionally mixed in the active & tumultuous departments of existence - & on these alone my recollection rests with any satisfaction - though not the best parts of it.<sup>1</sup>

While stating his preference for the 'talents of action', Byron also gives those actions a recognizable context, 'war - or the Senate', which recalls the second stanza of 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher' ('the Senate, or Camp'), and implicitly defines their value. For the individual uses his 'talents' to

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1. November 29, 1813, LJ. III, 179/180.

contribute to issues outside himself of public consequence or human interest. Again, he is a 'participator'. The poet, on the other hand, uses his 'rhyme' for his own benefit: to prevent himself from going 'mad'. The splendid volcano image, which is but a fresh metaphor for Aristotelian catharsis, captures finely the diseased state of the poet suggested in the Windham passage. Of course, the proximity between poetry and insanity has a substantial tradition behind it, but Byron is not making exactly the same points as his predecessors. He is suggesting that the writing of poetry is a selfish matter: it is 'useful' to the poet alone, 'anticipating & preventing' his 'disorder'. In addition to being a 'spectator' here, the poet is also a 'dreamer' who withdraws into factitious worlds of his own making. His 'speculations' are of an alternative, imaginative, existence which has no connection with, nor value for, real life. The parenthesis makes this quite clear: for religious 'speculations' are concerned with the spiritual welfare and life of mankind, hence Byron's emphatic distinction between 'religiously' and 'fancifully'.

This passage is at once a generalization about poets, poetry and action, and Byron's own apologia; for, while he desires to participate in the active world he acclaims, he is nonetheless reduced to remaining trapped in the very world he despises. Having 'occasionally mixed in the active & tumultuous departments of existence', he is now 'a mere spectator'.

If I had any views in this country, they would probably be parliamentary. But I have no ambition; at least, if any, it would be "aut Caesar aut nihil." ... Past events have unnerved me; and all I can now do is to make life an amusement, and look on, while others play. After all - even the highest game of crowns and sceptres, what is it? Vide Napoleon's last twelvemonth.<sup>1</sup>

It must be remembered that the Journal from which this passage comes, and the above letter to Annabella were both written after Byron had delivered all three of his speeches in the House of Lords, and at a time when he had already become disillusioned with parliamentary life. Hence, the 'Past events'

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1. LJ. III, 217/218.

by which he has been 'unnerved', clearly refer to his political experience as much as to other details we shall be discussing here. And this serves to underscore the 'Apathy', 'disgust' and 'perhaps incapacity' which, as he says to Annabella, have reduced him to a 'mere spectator'. For he has been 'unnerved', has lost confidence or become disheartened, by his experiences in real life. We shall be tracing his performance in and progressive loss of enthusiasm for the House of Lords in the following chapter. Here however, it needs to be noted that the House of Lords was Byron's first theatre of action in real life, and one of the foremost reasons for his eventually neglecting the House altogether, was precisely because it did seem to him like a theatre: a 'stage' where one 'mouthed' and performed 'mummeries'.<sup>1</sup> Thus when he says that all he can now do is to 'look on, while others play' (italics added), and questions 'even the highest game of crowns and sceptres, what is it?' (italics added), he is expressing an attitude towards real life. For life seems to him to have no tangibility, no gravitas; it is mere role-playing ('play'), and a 'game', which as he says elsewhere in the section from which this passage is taken, and in connection with Napoleon and the 'highest game of crowns and sceptres', he feels is 'a mere jeu of the gods'.<sup>2</sup> And indeed the reference to Napoleon and his 'last twelvemonth' (Byron is thinking of Moscow and Leipzig), which 'completely upset [his] system of fatalism',<sup>3</sup> underlines Byron's uneasiness about real life and his doubts of significant action. We shall be dealing with Byron's attitude to Napoleon in detail in chapter 3. But here the point to be noted is that to Byron Napoleon represented the modern Prometheus; he was the archetype of the man of action, in whom Byron's hopes for the inauguration of a new era

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1. LJ. III, 32, 229, 206.

2. LJ. III, 218.

3. LJ. III, 218.

in history were vested. The turn of Napoleon's fortunes deepened Byron's suspicions of the impossibility of significant action. And the seeds of his disappointment and his distrust of real life are apparent here.

Although Byron denies having any 'ambition', he clearly still does have. But since his parliamentary career would not have led to his being a 'Caesar' in his view, he chooses to be nothing in that line rather than remain an 'also-ran'. This may look like 'Apathy', or lack of application, and Byron himself suggests that it is. He closes the entry from which the above passage is taken, with the gloomy resignation, 'I shall never be any thing, or rather always nothing. The most I can hope is, that some will say, "He might, perhaps, if he would"'.<sup>1</sup> The 'nothing' here, reminds us of the 'nihil' in the above passage. But this is not just 'Apathy'. It is rather, 'disgust' with real life which seems, from his own experience in it and from the incipient downfall of his hero, Napoleon, to offer no satisfactory area in which to pursue an active occupation.

However, as we shall see in chapter 2, Byron also complained that he found the House of Lords 'dull',<sup>2</sup> and not 'animating'.<sup>3</sup> This 'animating' quality, stimulation or intensity, is precisely what he needed to get him out of himself. And since he could not find a stimulating activity in real life to engross him, he turned to poetry:

To withdraw myself from myself (oh that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all; and publishing is also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself.<sup>4</sup>

This lends force to the argument above that Byron considered the writing of poetry selfish. Here, he too writes in order to prevent himself from going

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1. LJ. III, 218.
  2. LJ. IX, 17.
  3. LJ. VII, 205, and LJ. IX, 17.
  4. LJ. III, 225.

'mad';<sup>1</sup> poetry stimulates the 'mind, which else recoils upon itself.' The word 'recoils' is particularly apt as it suggests the corrosive or self-destructive nature of the thought he wishes to avoid through writing. What is clear from this then, is that Byron sought to set a distance between what Eliot would call 'the man who suffers and the mind which creates'.<sup>2</sup> He wrote in order to escape from self - to achieve some degree of self-objectification. Such an aim, of course, leads us directly back to the tension between Byron the man and Byron the poet. And in the following letter written to Lady Melbourne, referring to The Bride of Abydos (1813), Byron makes it clear that he is aware of this tension:

In the last three days I have been quite shut up - my mind has been from late and later events in such a state of fermentation that as usual I have been obliged to empty it in rhyme - & am in the very heart of another Eastern tale ... this is my usual resource - if it were not for some such occupation to dispel reflection during inaction - I verily believe I should very often go mad.<sup>3</sup>

The mental state of 'fermentation' here recalls that state suggested by the volcano image we encountered in Byron's letter to Annabella above.<sup>4</sup> Again, writing poetry is a release from the emotional self, a preventative from going 'mad', and anti-social. By physically isolating himself for three days, he reflects the selfish and withdrawn world of poetry, the world of 'retirement', which we saw most noticeably in 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher'. The most significant point arising from this however, is that the state of 'fermentation' is induced by the recent events of real life (the 'late and later events'), with which the man is unable to cope. The poet then, reacts to and away from the immediate experience of the man; and he does so imaginatively distancing himself from it in time and space (hence, 'another Eastern tale', *italics added*). But, as we have seen, Byron admired the 'talents of action',<sup>5</sup>

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1. LJ. III, 179.
  2. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T. S. Eliot, Selected Prose. Edited by John Hayward, (Harmondsworth, 1958), p. 27.
  3. To Lady Melbourne, November 4, 1813, LJ. III, 157.
  4. LJ. III, 179.
  5. LJ. III, 179.

and 'agents and leaders',<sup>1</sup> and the qualities that made Windham 'an active participator in the events of the earth'.<sup>2</sup> Yet here we find him shunning the responsibilities of the man, and resorting to poetry as a means of escape from that very life with which he longs to engage. And on this score the phrase 'some such occupation to dispel reflection during inaction' is crucial. For, having no 'occupation' in real life, Byron remains an easy prey to selfish brooding. Poetry provides a distraction: it neutralizes the force of the mind 'which else recoils upon itself', at the same time as it stimulates it (activates it, occupies it; 'action', 'occupation'); it gives Byron something to grapple with when, as a man, he is inactive. The condition precedent of 'inaction' then, is imperative to the writing of poetry. And the implication arising from this is that, had Byron the man an active pursuit or occupation in real life, that occupation would itself absorb him, divert him from himself; action would replace poetry (in effect, this is precisely what happens when he commits himself to the Greek cause at the close of his life).

Again in reference to The Bride of Abydos, the following statement from his Journal is relevant here:

I am much more indebted to the tale than I can ever be to the most partial reader; as it wrung my thoughts from reality to imagination - from selfish regrets to vivid recollections - and recalled me to a country replete with the brightest and darkest, but always most lively colours of my memory.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of space then, he retreats to the East; in terms of time, he retreats into the memory. On a somewhat peripheral note this comes extraordinarily close to Coleridge's definition of the 'fancy' in Chapter XIII of his Biographia Literaria: 'a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space'.<sup>4</sup>

It is also similar to Shelley's statement in his Defence that, to the poet, 'time and place and number are not'.<sup>5</sup> And we may recall that Wordsworth too,

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1. LJ. III, 217.
  2. LJ. III, 219.
  3. LJ. III, 230/231.
  4. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria. Edited by George Watson (London, Dent, 1956), p. 167.
  5. The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Newly edited by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. 10 Vols. (London, 1965), VII, p. 112.



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in his Preface, defined the creative act as a species of 'recollection'.<sup>1</sup> So that with his 'vivid recollections' and his own variety of 'memory', Byron shares, at this juncture, something of the outlook of his contemporaries and is holding fast to a recognizably Romantic tenet. Importantly, however, Byron's memories bear their own idiosyncratic stamp. It is not their moral status that concerns him, but their intensity: 'the brightest and darkest, but always most lively colours of my memory' (notice his emphasized superlatives). Again the withdrawn world of poetry is emphasized ('it wrung my thoughts from reality to imagination'), as is its selfishness: he is more 'indebted' to what the 'tale' did for him during its creation, than he is to the 'tale' as an accomplished object (we shall return to the implications of this shortly; it suggests that poetry is only a temporary stimulant). These points are re-iterated in a letter to Moore, which also concerns The Bride of Abydos:

All convulsions end with me in rhyme ... I have written this, and published it, for the sake of the employment, - to wring my thoughts from reality, and take refuge in "imaginings," however "horrible".<sup>2</sup>

What arises from this is that, in order to overcome the bitterness of his recent experience in 'reality', Byron recalls such memories that match in emotional intensity the degree of emotion ('fermentation', 'convulsions') caused by that experience. The emotional recall, not the actual memories recalled, is the criterion. The quality or nature of those memories, whether they be 'brightest' or 'darkest' or 'however "horrible"', is immaterial, so long as they be 'lively', 'vivid'; that is, intense, stimulating. Yet, as has been suggested above, if Byron had had a satisfactory active pursuit in real life, that pursuit itself would have answered to his need for stimulation which he looked to poetry to provide. In the following passage from a letter to Annabella, it is clear that Byron sought such intensity in real life:

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1. Preface (1802). Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads. Edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 266.
  2. To Thomas Moore, November 30, 1813, LJ. III, 184.

The great object of life is Sensation - to feel that we exist - even though in pain - it is this "craving void" which drives us to Gaming - to Battle - to Travel - to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

Again no moral distinction is made between the various 'pursuits' posited here. Intensity ('Sensation', 'agitation') in whatever form it may offer itself, is alone the necessary antidote to the sense of the nullity of life (the "craving void", a phrase from Pope).<sup>2</sup> And significantly, such intensity is the 'great object of life' (italics added). This emphasizes its existential value: existence as such is a vacuum, but 'intemperate but keenly felt pursuits' make us 'feel that we exist'. 'Sensation' makes us feel we are alive. As Byron was to write to Moore: 'A man must travel, and turmoil, or there is no existence'.<sup>3</sup> There are various references to such intensity throughout Byron's letters and journals, but perhaps the most telling instance is what he has to say of 'Gaming' in his Detached Thoughts (1821/22):

I have a notion that Gamblers are as happy as most people - being always excited; - women - wine - fame - the table - even Ambition - sate now & then - but every turn of the card - & cast of the dice - keeps the Gambler alive - besides one can Game ten times longer than one can do anything else. - I was very fond of it when young ... /but/ ... When Macco ... was introduced I gave up the whole thing - for I loved and missed the rattle and dash of the box & dice - and the glorious uncertainty not only of good luck or bad luck - but of any luck at all ... It was the delight of the thing that pleased me.<sup>4</sup>

This is splendid. The 'being always excited', 'the rattle and dash of the dice & box' (and notice how Byron conveys his relish for the vigour and excitement of the game in his choice and emphasis of these two words), and the 'glorious uncertainty' of the outcome, constitute the 'delight' of the 'Gambler' - not, be it noted, the winning or losing. To be kept constantly on his mettle, preoccupied with immediate experience, and stretched to the limit of his

1. To Annabella Milbanke, September 6, 1813, LJ. III, 109.
2. Eloisa to Abelard, line 94.
3. To Thomas Moore, August 31, 1820, LJ. VII, 170. Cf. "Surely you agree with me about the real vacuum of human pursuits, but one must force an object of attainment - not to rust in the Scabbard altogether." LJ. VI, 116; To Hobhouse, June 8, 1820. See also LJ. III, 213 and LJ. V, 45.
4. LJ. IX, 23.

nervous energy, are what makes the gambler 'happy' and gaming attractive. And the same can be said for 'Battle' and 'Travel', although Byron emphasizes the duration of the intensity afforded by gambling; other stimulates may 'sate', but the gambler is 'always' excited'. Such a prescription for the "craving void", an activity of enduring intensity, is central to Byron's psychology at this time in his quest for a 'pursuit'. We noted earlier that he did not find the House of Lords 'animating', and we also noted his 'disgust' with life as a 'game'. What he needed was to find in real life a durable 'objective correlative' for his restlessness. In other words, an 'occupation' or 'employment' that would absorb, exhaust, concentrate, or otherwise match the irresolute energy he possessed. Such an attitude is negative, or even, paradoxically, passive, in so far as he must be stimulated. His own initiative seems to be absent; he reacts to, responds to, circumstances. And as we have recently seen, his poetry also is a response to 'events'. Yet it cannot be placed in the same category as 'Gaming'; for it is evident that the composition of poetry as a stimulant to the mind is only of limited effect. Within three days of completing The Bride of Abydos, for instance, Byron was writing in his Journal:

I wish I could settle to reading again, - my life is monotonous, and yet desultory. I take up books, and fling them down again. I began a comedy and burnt it because the scene ran into reality; - a novel, for the same reason. In rhyme, I can keep more away from facts; but the thought always runs through, through ... yes, yes, through.<sup>1</sup>

His restlessness is apparent here. But the overwhelming power of 'reality' to obtrude where it is least wanted, does not suggest that writing is the most dependable means of withdrawing himself from himself, nor of occupying his mind 'to dispel reflection during inaction'; for even 'In rhyme', 'the thought always runs through'. We shall return to these issues and the implications they raise in the final two chapters. But what concerns us

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1. LJ. III, 209.

here is the brevity of the stimulation afforded to Byron by the composition of the poem. No sooner is it written than his life becomes 'monotonous' and 'desultory' again. Poetry therefore, unlike 'Gaming' in Byron's view recorded above, is only a temporary measure yielding short-term intensity and relief from self, after which the "craving void", so admirably captured in this passage, reasserts itself. Despite the lapse of three years, the same point is suggested in a crucial stanza from Childe Harold III (1816):

'Tis to create, and in creating live  
A being more intense, that we endow  
With form our fancy, gaining as we give  
The life we image, even as I do now.  
What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,  
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,  
Invisible but gazing, as I glow  
Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,  
And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feeling's dearth. 6

We saw earlier that Byron regarded 'Sensation' as the 'great object of life' (italics added), and here he seems to be making the same claim for poetry.<sup>1</sup> He states that the product of the poet, the 'Soul' of his 'thought', has an existence independent of, and greater and more durable than, the mind that created it. As a poet, he lives more intensely in creating poetry than he exists as a man in real life where he is otherwise 'Nothing'. This may look as if Byron is now placing poetry and the poet above the man and real life, in contrast to his former priority. But this is not so. The first four lines indicate that it is only during the actual process of composition, only in the creative act itself, that such intensity can be experienced. The whole emphasis in these lines is on the sense of immediacy. The enjambments, the use of participles (the participle being the most immediate form of the present tense), and prepositions contribute to this: he lives intensely 'in creating', 'gaining as /he/ give/s', 'even as I do now' (italics added). And the remaining five lines promote the same point through the actual union in his poetry of the

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1. Cf. 'The Dream', 19/21; Childe Harold IV, 5; The Lament of Tasso, II, 37/58, and the opening lines of The Prophecy of Dante.

poet with his creation. This is perfectly captured in the phrase 'Invisible but gazing', as if the poet is 'gazing' through the eyes of his own creation; or vice versa, as if Childe Harold is 'gazing' through the eyes of Byron the poet (the ambiguity only lends itself to the idea of union). Poet and his creation merge (emphasized also by 'with whom I traverse earth', and the words 'Mix'd' and 'blended'). In a certain respect, Byron enacts in the last five lines what he has stated or conceptualized in the first four: he gains as he gives the life he images forth in his verse. But, notice the persistent use of the present tense: the sense of immediacy conveyed by 'gazing', 'glow', 'Mix'd', 'blended', 'feeling' and, most significantly, 'birth'. The union of the poet with his product, and the intensity gained thereby, endures no longer than the 'birth' of the poem. The word 'birth' underscores the brevity of the experience of intensity, the ultimate independence of the thing born (the autonomy of the artifact), and the consequent annulment ('Nothing') of the artificer. Clearly then, this fine stanza re-iterates that the creative act provides a sense of intensity, but it suggests that once that process is over, intensity evaporates and the "craving void" resumes: after brief stimulation, Byron is 'Nothing' again. We shall return to this in greater detail in our discussion of The Lament of Tasso and The Prophecy of Dante. In a letter to Moore, Byron returns to this issue rather more pointedly, but with a different emphasis:

I can never get people to understand that poetry is the expression of excited passion, and that there is no such thing as a life of passion any more than a continuous earthquake, or an eternal fever. Besides, who would ever shave themselves in such a state?<sup>1</sup>

The reference to an 'earthquake' here will remind us of Byron's earlier definition of poetry in his letter to Annabella,<sup>2</sup> and it serves to emphasize its transitory nature. The deliberate bathos of the final sentence highlights the practical attitude with which Byron is determined to regard poetry. The abnormal and temporary state of mind in which poetry is produced, is brought

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1. To Thomas Moore, July 5, 1821, LJ. VIII, 146.
  2. LJ. III, 179.

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into greater relief by being set against the normal, ordinary and mundane matter of shaving - the humorous choice of which bears the perfect stamp of the Byron of Don Juan. Again then, the temporary intensity and cathartic nature of poetry, together with the distinction between the poet and the man whose respective conditions are irreconcilable, are reaffirmed here. Although written a little time before this passage, the following stanza from Don Juan IV (1820), represents its poetic counterpart:

Yet there will still be bards. Though fame is smoke,  
Its fumes are frankincense to human thought;  
And the unquiet feelings, which first woke  
Song in the world, will seek what then they sought.  
As on the beach the waves at last are broke,  
Thus to their extreme verge the passions brought  
Dash into poetry, which is but passion,  
Or at least was so ere it grew a fashion.

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This is magnificent. As so often with Byron, the energy and apparent facility with which he writes disguise the very careful structuring behind these lines. The opening monosyllabic sentence blandly states the ubiquity and persistence of 'bards' (and even this archaism is used for ironic, if not comic, effect). He then presents us with the true nature of 'fame': 'smoke' - nothing tangible, mere vapour, an illusion, to which nonetheless 'human thought' is attracted and by which it is intoxicated. Indeed, the development of 'fame' from 'smoke' to 'fumes' and to 'frankincense' in the second line, captures brilliantly the transformation of its reality as an illusion into a delusion, which 'human thought' through pride and vanity (both 'fumes' and 'frankincense' carry overtones of worship and suggest intoxication with praise), blindly or wilfully treats as the reality itself. The irony is that those who write for 'fame', write, in effect, for nothing substantial at all. Hence Byron's turning to what he considers to be the real origin and initial aim of poetry in the next two lines is a subtle manoeuvre. The use of the conjunction 'And' appears to relate these two lines to the preceding two; as if the idea expressed in this second pair follows on logically from that expressed in the first pair. But quite the opposite is the case; the 'And' introduces no logical deduction,



but is a deceptive disjunction around which his irony pivots. For the true origin of poetry is not the allurements of 'fame', but 'unquiet feelings' which, now as always, 'will seek what then they sought', which is expression, not 'fame'. Byron is insisting that the real reason for writing poetry has not changed from its original reason. Yet he had led us to expect some new explanation for writing poetry which is where his disjunctive 'And' plays its functional part. For we anticipate a new reason connected with 'fame'; our anticipation is increased by the acceleration over the enjambment and the use of the future tense ('will seek'), only to be dashed by the bathetic return to the past tense and first principles in 'what then they sought'. Such dexterity makes his point all the more emphatic: poetry has not changed; it was and is, in the words of his letter to Moore above, 'the expression of excited passion'.<sup>1</sup> This refusal to offer any novel validity for the writing of poetry, together with his deliberately flat or restrained tone, suggest that Byron is making a cut at the highflown propositions concerning poetry made by his contemporaries - principally, no doubt, Wordsworth. He will not exalt or idealize poetry, but say what he really considers it to be. And this is continued in the remainder of the stanza. The tone rises in the first two and a half lines of the next quatrain, and is matched by the increased energy in the image of the waves expending themselves on the shore. This image is splendidly effective. By placing the metaphor first, 'As on the beach ...', Byron carefully builds up the tension in these lines, which is thus all the more forcefully exploded in the phrase 'Dash into poetry'. The metaphor is developed logically, 'As ... Thus', and so distinguishes itself from the non-logical sequence of the first quatrain. Byron is giving us an image of what poetry really is. The simple scansion of line 5, becomes more tortuous in the next one and a half lines (lines 6 and 7 up to the caesura), admirably echoing the strain which poetry eventually dissipates. The inversion in line 6, and the enjambment into line 7,

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1. LJ. VIII, 146.

contribute to this effect and thus make 'Dash', at the opening of line 7, emphatic in its energy and resolution. And, indeed, 'Dash' is the crucial word, and is densely comprehensive: it embraces the shattering of the waves/passions, the hurry and immediacy, and the reaching of the climax towards which the whole of the image has progressed. We then return to the quiet or subdued tone in the explanatory understatement, 'which is but passion', which in turn is followed by the dismissive understatement of the final line. And the bathos is completed. Notice also the telling rhyme-scheme of the final couplet: 'passion'/'fashion'. This again establishes a tension between what poetry really is, 'passion', and what it has become in the hands of poetasters seeking after 'fame', 'a fashion'. Notice also that it is merely 'a fashion' (italics added), not even the 'fashion'. The indefinite article indicates that such fraudulent poetry is only one amongst a number of fashions, which will, like all fashions, have its day. Byron's defiant assertion redeems the true nature of poetry.

To make the relationship between this stanza and the prose passage which preceded it quite clear then: poetry is the result of intensity of feeling that seeks release through expression. Its expression brings relief to the man who thereby regains a state of equilibrium in which he can do such an ordinary thing as 'shave'. Byron enacts this very process within the structure of the stanza, passing from the restrained tone of the first quatrain, to the more 'excited', energetic and figurative language of the next two and a half lines, only to return to the flat, or flatter, tone of the final one and a half lines. It is a fine example of how skilfully he can weld together form and content.

In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot asserts that poetry is 'not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality'.<sup>1</sup> Now, while Byron would certainly agree that one of his principal aims in writing poetry was to

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1. T. S. Eliot. Selected Prose. Edited by John Hayward, (Harmondsworth, 1958), p. 30.

'escape' from 'emotion' and 'personality', it seems that he would challenge the rest of Eliot's argument. For his own statement of poetry as 'the expression of excited passion' suggests that it is 'an escape from emotion' through 'a turning loose of emotion'; an escape from, through the usage of. By turning it loose, by giving expression to his emotion, Byron thereby escapes it, gets rid of it. Although Byron's position here shares much in common with that discussed earlier, there is a radical difference between this stanza from Don Juan and stanza 6 of Childe Harold III. For in that stanza he turned to poetry as a vehicle of intensity; he could 'live/A being more intense' in poetry than in real life. And, from a different point of view from the cautionary one expressed in the subsequent discussion of that stanza, it is evident that Byron accepted and exalted the world of poetry there because of its very intensity. Poetry offered an intenser alternative to life, however much it was earlier argued that the intensity is only temporary (only 'in creating', italics added). But in this stanza from Don Juan, Byron is suggesting that poetry is the receptacle of intense feeling, the relief from which, rather than the sensation of which, is the end of writing. He does not turn to poetry to feel intensely, as in the Childe Harold stanza, but to get rid of feeling intensely altogether. This is confirmed in the following passage from a letter to Moore. Moore tells us that he had written to Byron late in 1820, saying that he felt about his art 'as the French husband did when he found a man making love to his (the Frenchman's) wife: - "Comment, Monsieur, - sans y être obligé!"' <sup>1</sup>. Byron replied:

I feel exactly as you do about our "art," but it comes over me in a kind of rage every now and then, like \*\*\*\*, and then, if I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad. As to that regular, uninterrupted love of writing, ... I do not understand it. I feel it as a torture, which I must get rid of, but never as a pleasure. On the contrary, I think composition a great pain.<sup>2</sup>

1. LJ. VIII, 55n.

2. To Thomas Moore, January 2, 1821, LJ. VIII, 55; see also LJ. XI, 234, for erratum.

This is much more in the familiar vein of his letter to Lady Melbourne (November 4, 1813), than it is in the desperate assertion of the Childe Harold stanza: 'rage', 'torture', 'pain', are quite distinct from the complacency of such phrases as 'Tis to create, and in creating live/A being more intense', 'Soul of my thought!', 'as I glow'. The matured Byron is returning to the honest aspersions of his pre-1816 period, and to his attitude then held of poetry as catharsis.

This is not to say that Byron held consistent views of the function, remedial or otherwise, of poetry at various periods of his life. For instance, writing to Kinnaid on January 23, 1822, he says that he will continue to write and publish 'because it is an occupation of mind - like play - or any other stimulus.'<sup>1</sup>, which is very close to the intensity he describes in the Childe Harold stanza. Yet a year later, writing to John Hunt (March 17, 1823), he says, somewhat more pathetically, 'I continue to compose for the same reason that I ride, or read, or bathe, or travel - it is a habit.'<sup>2</sup>; the reduction of a 'stimulus' to a 'habit' deprives it of its edge of intensity: it is merely part of a routine.

Nonetheless, a comparison between the two stanzas does underline two fundamentally different attitudes towards poetry, and it is significant that Byron's standpoint in 1816 should have been so close to embracing the Word and accepting the world of poetry. For he, like his hero Napoleon, had suffered a reversal of fortune and had been rejected and ostracized by society. Isolated and exiled, he needed to turn to what inner resources he possessed in order to sustain himself; and poetry was his principal support. Yet, as chapter 4 will argue with particular reference to The Lament of Tasso and the first canto of The Prophecy of Dante, the very temporary relief poetry initially

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1. LJ. IX, 92.

2. LJ. X, 123.

gives him, eventually entrenches him further in self. And, as it will again be suggested in that chapter, it is only when he ceases to write about himself and his sufferings, and assumes the public role of 'prophet' with a specific message for others, that he achieves any real redemption from self. That is, the Word must be used in its creative sense of 'Logos', not, as we have seen in connection with the poem 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher', as a means of negative withdrawal from life. Again, chapter 4 will trace Byron's progress towards this creative use of the Word. But here it needs to be noted that the position eventually reached is positive, and lacks the selfish motivation we have seen earlier. Byron will ultimately be seen as having achieved a poetic standpoint where he can, with justice, regard himself as one of those 'who have ever done good or attempted to instruct or better mankind'.<sup>1</sup> The achievement of such a position will remind us of the aspiration fostered by Manfred in his youth, 'To make my own the mind of other men,/The enlightener of nations',<sup>2</sup> but which his proud individualism prevented him from realizing, 'I could not tame my nature down'.<sup>3</sup> But it is precisely the absence of self-assertion, and the unselfish use of the Word - the treatment of it as an object 'to instruct or better mankind' (the wording is Johnsonian, but compare Byron's use of 'words are things',<sup>4</sup>) that distinguish the poet of Manfred from the mature poet of The Prophecy of Dante.

While this distinction underlines the development in Byron's attitude towards poetry, it also represents a crucial aspect in the development of his attitude towards action. For, as has been suggested earlier, and will arise again in chapter 2, his initial desire for action is also prompted by selfish interests: chiefly, to achieve 'fame',<sup>5</sup> but also, as with poetry, to get

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1. To Kinnaid, January 26, 1822, LJ. IX, 94.
  2. Manfred. III, 1, 106/107.
  3. Manfred. III, 1, 116.
  4. DJ. III, 88.
  5. See also, 'I am not insensible to Glory, & even hope before I am at Rest, to see some service in a military Capacity'. To Long, May 1, 1807, LJ. 1, 119.

him out of himself ('to withdraw myself from myself'),<sup>1</sup> But again, this selfish motivation and self-assertion constitute an obstacle to committed action (though there is the additional factor of the problem of 'choice', which will be discussed in the final chapter). And it is only when he ceases to assert himself, and voluntarily submits himself to a 'cause' (at first the Italian fiasco, and then, more importantly, the Greek War of Independence), that his role as participator in the world of action becomes significant. This is the central issue around which the final chapter pivots. And, as will there be suggested (principally in our discussion of 'On this Day'), Byron eventually recognizes that significant action constitutes not the assertion of self, but the abnegation of self. And consequent upon this, and by a curious series of paradoxes, the self simultaneously redeems itself from itself, and finds self-fulfilment in self-denial. The crucial point is the self's acknowledgement of something higher and greater than it, the 'cause'.

This is one of the principal themes of Byron's drama Marino Faliero.<sup>2</sup> This was written during a time when Byron's interest in Italian politics was increasing, but before he had taken any active role. Nonetheless, it captures Byron's conviction of self-sacrifice to the 'cause'; and his credo is perhaps best expressed by Israel Bertuccio in the following lines:

We must forget all feelings save the me.  
We must resign all passions save our purpose,  
We must behold no object save our country,  
And only look on Death as beautiful,  
So that the sacrifice ascend to Heaven,  
And draw down Freedom on her evermore.<sup>3</sup>

The exclusion of self-interest is emphasized by the imperative anaphora ('We must', followed by the repeated 'save'), as it is by the end-word of each line, 'one', 'purpose', 'country'; while the timeless dimension of the 'sacrifice' is emphasized by the end-words of the final three lines, 'beautiful', 'Heaven',

1. LJ. III, 225.

2. Begun in 1817, and completed in 1820; published with The Prophecy of Dante, April 1821, Poetry, IV, 325/328.

3. Marino Faliero, II, 11, 87/92

'evermore'. Moreover, the words before the caesura in the first three lines, 'feelings', 'passions', 'object', which suggest the limited and time-bound interests of the individual self, are counterpointed by the similarly situated words in the subsequent three lines, 'Death', 'sacrifice', 'Freedom', which emphasize the necessary self-denial, yet eternal ('evermore') consequence, the conspiracy involves. The absence of self-interest, and the promotion only of the 'cause', is underscored by Israel's last retort to Calandaro in this scene:

My object is to make your cause end well,  
And not to push myself to power. Experience,  
Some skill, and your own choice, had marked me out  
To act in trust as your commander, till  
Some worthier should appear: if I have found such  
As you yourselves shall own more worthy, think you  
That I would hesitate from selfishness,  
And, covetous of brief authority,  
Stake our deep interest on my single thoughts,  
Rather than yield to one above me in  
All leading qualities?<sup>1</sup>

The sincerity of this is served by the fluidity of the verse: the ease of movement through the lines, the enjambments and otherwise light end-stoppings, the absence of inversions or dependence upon rhetorical devices, lend themselves to the simple gravity with which Israel is speaking. The passage has all the artlessness of truth. The first sentence states the point succinctly in general terms; while the second sentence, spun out over the subsequent eight lines, develops the statement, adhering strictly to the salient details it involves, and thereby underpins it. And the marvellous though unobtrusive counterpointing of opposites throughout, emphasizes the superiority of the 'cause' over the private interests of the individual: 'My object'/'your cause', 'not to push myself to power'/'act in trust as your commander', 'our deep interest'/'my single thoughts' (this is particularly effective in lines 181 and 189, where 'My object'/'your cause' and 'our deep interest'/'my single thoughts' balance each other within the line). Even the enumerated 'Experience', 'Some skill, and your own choice', as against the condensed 'All leading qualities', contributes to this counterpointing (with the 'Some' and the 'All' acting as fine emphatic line-beginnings, and so drawing attention to their

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1. Marino Faliero, II, ii, 181/191.

contrariety). Besides this, there is again a polarity suggested between transient and permanent 'power': the 'deep interest' of the 'cause' whose aim it is to 'draw down Freedom' on its 'country' for 'evermore', as against the 'selfishness' which is 'covetous of brief authority'. And the no doubt intentional allusion here to Isabella's speech in Measure for Measure,<sup>1</sup> only serves to underscore the contemptible nature of those who struggle for such paltry and limited 'selfish' power, in contrast to the real and enduring power of the 'cause'.

This is a far cry from Byron's ambition to be "'aut Caesar aut nihil'", as stated in his Journal for 1813/1814,<sup>2</sup> the whole emphasis is away from self-interest and self-assertion, away from the desire for 'fame' we saw in connection with the poem 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher', and towards a positive commitment to something above and beyond him. This is not, however, to say that Byron was to accept the consequences and the necessary concomitants of such commitment, either blindly or complacently. The character of Bertram in Marino Faliero, expresses his reservations:

I own my natural weakness; I have not  
Yet learned to think of indiscriminate murder  
Without some sense of shuddering; and the sight  
Of blood which spouts through hoary scalps is not  
To me a thing of triumph, nor the death  
Of man surprised a glory.<sup>3</sup>

This too, bears all the marks of sincerity, which the noticeable absence of punctuation serves to emphasize (three relatively light stops in six lines; the momentum of feeling scarcely pauses for breath). Indeed, the honesty of such an admission in what is in fact a crucial confrontation between himself and his more adamant fellow conspirators, indicates the strength of Bertram's humanitarianism, and implicitly abjures the bloodshed that the conspiracy will necessarily involve. The sentiments are admirable; and Byron wishes us to

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1. 'but man, proud man,/Drest in a little brief authority, ...' Measure for Measure, II, 11, 117/123, the whole context is relevant.
  2. LJ, III, 217.
  3. Marino Faliero, III, 11, 64/69.



recognize them as being so. For, while Israel may express Byron's dedication to action and the consequent self-denial of the individual, Bertram voices Byron's horror and disgust at the measures necessary to the dawn of 'Freedom'. Nonetheless, Bertram represents the 'selfishness' of misplaced pity. However generous his thoughts and feelings are towards his former guardian, Lioni, it is Bertram's weakness of affection that leads to the downfall of the conspiracy. Whatever else Bertram may be said to represent in the play his example serves to underscore that no concern with private interests is compatible with the demands of the cause.

Such sentiments are central to Byron's attitude towards action, from his time in Ravenna to his last days in Greece, and they find constant expression in his letters and Journals of that period. By 1821, Byron had been thoroughly initiated into the Carbonari movement, and in his Ravenna Journal, which he kept during a time of intense activity from January 4 to February 27, he makes his position quite clear. On January 9, 1821, he records:

They mean to insurrect here, and are to honour me with a call thereupon. I shall not fall back; though I don't think them in force or heart sufficient to make much of it. But, onward! - it is now the time to act, and what signifies self, if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unquenchedly to the future? It is not one man, nor a million, but the spirit of liberty which must be spread. The waves which dash upon the shore are, one by one, broken, but yet the ocean conquers, nevertheless. It overwhelms the Armada, it wears the rock, and, if the Neptunians are to be believed, it has not only destroyed, but made a world. In like manner, whatever the sacrifice of individuals, the great cause will gather strength, sweep down what is rugged, and fertilize (for sea-weed is manure) what is cultivable. And so, the mere selfish calculation ought never to be made on such occasions; and, at present, it shall not be computed by me.<sup>1</sup>

The main thrust of this is towards perpetuating what is of enduring value. While the subservience of the 'self' to the cause ('the spirit of liberty which must be spread'), is palpably evident, the significance of that subservience is given fresh impetus by the introduction of an historical dimension. For, the idea of the present acting as a mediator between the

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1. LJ. VIII, 20.

past and the future, 'if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unquenchedly to the future',<sup>1</sup> not only seems to reflect one of Byron's most cryptic definitions of poetry, recorded later in the Ravenna Journal, 'What is Poetry? - The feeling of a former world and Future',<sup>2</sup> but strikingly demonstrates the responsibility which the present has to the coherence and evolution of history. The present acts, as does Israel Bertuccio, 'in trust',<sup>3</sup> from past to future. The thought has been similarly expressed in this century by Camus: 'Real generosity towards the future lies in giving all to the present'.<sup>4</sup> This historical aspect, then, underscores the consequential import of the individual's sacrifice of 'self' to the cause, which the magnificent image of the 'waves' and 'ocean', and Byron's own construing of that image, amply serve to illustrate. The sea is one of Byron's most frequent images of freedom and eternity,<sup>5</sup> and he exploits it to full effect here. The 'spirit of liberty' is abiding and indestructible, like the 'ocean': and though its individual advocates may be destroyed in championing its cause, they nonetheless contribute to securing its eventual victory. Although Byron was perfectly aware that 'Revolutions are not to be made with Rose-water',<sup>6</sup> it is interesting to see how creatively he regards the process of 'the great cause': it will 'sweep down what is rugged' (italics added), that is, what is unshaped or unsmoothed; it will 'fertilize ... what is cultivable', that is, encourage or bring to fruition what latent resources already exist. It is thus seen as both a refining and creative process.<sup>7</sup>

Byron was to reiterate his own standpoint two days later in the same Journal (January 11):

1. The image is appropriately Promethean, and indeed recalls the 'Promethean spark' of Manfred, I, 1, 154.
2. LJ. VIII, 37. For an excellent discussion of this definition, see J. Drummond Bone, 'Byron's Ravenna Diary Entry', The Byron Journal (1978), pp. 78/89.
3. Marino Faliero, II, 11, 184.
4. The Rebel. Albert Camus. Trans. Anthony Bower (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 268.
5. The two go hand in hand. See particularly, Childe Harold IV, 179/184.
6. LJ. VII, 77, to John Murray, April 16, 1820.
7. The image, not insignificantly perhaps, is highly suggestive of the glacier/river transformation in Shelley's Mont Blanc.

I should almost regret that my own affairs went well, when those of nations are in peril. If the interests of mankind could be essentially bettered (particularly of these oppressed Italians), I should not so mind my own "sma' peculiar",<sup>1</sup>

Or again (February 18):

Today I have had no communication with my Carbonari cronies; but, in the mean time, my lower apartments are full of their bayonets, fusils, cartridges, and what not. I suppose that they consider me as a depôt, to be sacrificed, in case of accidents. It is no great matter, supposing that Italy could be liberated, who or what is sacrificed. It is a grand object - the very poetry of politics. Only think - a free Italy !!!<sup>2</sup>

Such selfless and active commitment to the cause is demonstrable throughout the Journal, which indeed often reads very much like a military log-book; advice given,<sup>3</sup> pass-words noted.<sup>4</sup> Rarely a day goes by without a reference to his meeting with his 'Carbonari cronies' or with Count Gamba, or without recording some development concerning the uprising. And his deep-rooted enthusiasm and excitement, revealed as much in the above passages as in such admissions as 'I have not yawned for these two days',<sup>5</sup> and 'Within these last few days I have read, but not written',<sup>6</sup> indicates to what degree real life was absorbing Byron, withdrawing him from himself. Here was an active context in which he found both intensity and purpose, at the same time as escaping from that 'mind, which else recoils upon itself'.<sup>7</sup> And most importantly, the selfish motivation towards action, which we saw in connection with 'To the Rev. J.T. Becher' and the 'Translation from Anacreon. To His Lyre', is wholly absent: 'Only think - a free Italy!!!' - even the exclamation marks serve to emphasize the sincerity of his concern for the success of the cause and not himself. And, when the affair was eventually 'bungled'<sup>8</sup> principally because

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1. LJ. VIII, 21.
  2. LJ. VIII, 47.
  3. January 8, 1821, LJ. VIII, 18.
  4. January 30, 1821, LJ. VIII, 40.
  5. January 8, 1821, LJ. VIII, 18.
  6. February 21, 1821, LJ. VIII, 48.
  7. LJ. III, 225.
  8. February 24, 1821, LJ. VIII, 49.

of the Neapolitans, but generally because of the Italians' 'lack of union among themselves',<sup>1</sup> although Byron's immediate reaction was to offer what funds he had at his disposal to finance any prospective venture,<sup>2</sup> his disappointment was extreme. The Journal breaks off as abruptly as does his Journal for 1813/1814 after the abdication of Napoleon and the restoration of the Bourbons,<sup>3</sup> and with Byron in a state of physical sickness. However much he may ascribe that condition to the cockles he had eaten or to the means he 'took to correct them' ('four glasses of spirits', 'some soda-powders', and 'more soda-water',<sup>4</sup>) clearly his revulsion at the Neapolitan betrayal was more than a contributory factor:

You know by this time with all Europe - the precious treachery and desertion of the Neapolitans. I was taken in like many others by their demonstrations - & have probably been more ashamed of them than they are of themselves. ... I can't laugh yet - the thing is a little too serious....<sup>5</sup>

Notice that this is written two months after his final Journal entry for February 27: and to Kinnaird, Murray, Shelley, Moore and Hodgson, he expresses his disgust and disappointment just as openly.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the very fact that he repeats his disappointment to all these recipients of his letters is evidence of how deeply his spirit was bruised and his hopes for Italy's freedom dashed. For, one of Byron's noticeable characteristics is that when anything of real significance happened to him, or whenever he did something remarkable (that is, whenever anything really meant something to him), he repeated it to all his friends.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, despite the failure of the Carbonari movement,<sup>8</sup> it was

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1. February 24, 1821, LJ. VIII, 49. Unity is precisely the message of The Prophecy of Dante.
  2. February 24, 1821, LJ. VIII, 49.
  3. LJ. III, 257.
  4. February 27, 1821, LJ. VIII, 51.
  5. To John Cam Hobhouse, April 26, 1821, LJ. VIII, 99/100.
  6. To Douglas Kinnaird, April 26, 1821, LJ. VIII, 101; to John Murray, April 26, 1821, LJ. VIII, 102; to Percy Bysshe Shelley, April 26, 1821, LJ. VIII, 104; to Thomas Moore, April 28, 1821, LJ. VIII, 104/105; To Francis Hodgson, May 12, 1821, LJ. VIII, 114.
  7. For example, his swimming from Sestos to Abydos, about which he told no less than six people, three of them twice, see LJ. I, 237/255; or the shooting of the Commandant, LJ. VII, 245/251.
  8. For the most comprehensive account of Byron's involvement with the Carbonari, see The Last Attachment. Iris Origo (London: John Murray, 1949), chapter 5, and Marchand, II, chapter xiii, 849ff.

the catalyst in shifting Byron from poetry to action, poet to man, <sup>of action</sup> spectator to participator. For, having tasted action he was no longer content to continue his 'Cisisbean existence',<sup>1</sup> and was ripe for the more strenuous demands of the Greek cause.

The first intimations of his interest in the Greek war come as early as June 1821, that is, only three months after the Italian business: 'The Greeks! what think you? They are my old acquaintances - but what to think I know not'.<sup>2</sup> Yet two more years were to pass before he could disentangle himself from Teresa completely. And this brings us to a rather fine but important distinction between Byron's involvement with the Carbonari and his ultimate commitment to Greece. In 1819 he had written to Hobhouse that he wanted 'a country - and a home - and if possible - a free one'.<sup>3</sup> A 'country', a 'home' and at least fighting for 'a free one', had been combined during his days in Ravenna. His association with the Carbonari naturally brought him close to the Gamba family, and vice versa. So that his political activities did not preclude the emotional security of his relations with Teresa. Indeed, his relationship with her had, indirectly, drawn him into the Carbonari, and hence there had been no obligation to choose between them.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Greece, however, such a choice did have to be made; and, as Byron admitted to Moore, he was not yet strong enough to break with Teresa:

It is awful work, this love, and prevents all a man's projects of good or glory. I wanted to go to Greece lately (as every thing seems up here) with her brother, who is a very fine, brave fellow ... and wild about liberty. But the tears of a woman who has left her husband for a man, and the weakness of one's own heart, are paramount to these projects, and I can hardly indulge them.<sup>5</sup>

Commenting on this passage, Harold Nicolson very justly remarks that

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1. To John Cam Hobhouse, August 23, 1819, LJ. VI, 214.
  2. To Thomas Moore, June 4, 1821, LJ. VIII, 135.
  3. To John Cam Hobhouse, October 3, 1819, LJ. VI, 226.
  4. See The Last Attachment, p. 203/205.
  5. To Thomas Moore, September 19, 1821, LJ. VIII, 214.

'had it not been for his responsibilities towards the Countess Guiccioli, he would have already joined the movement in the autumn of its first year'.<sup>1</sup> The operative word here is 'responsibilities'; for Byron was not faced with a choice between pleasure and action, or between self and the commitment to the cause, but between conflicting duties. Indeed, the tenor of the above passage is one of resentment against the emotional pressure which Teresa could, with a certain amount of justice as Byron had to acknowledge (in so far as she was de facto, if not de jure, his wife), bring to bear upon him. Hence, what we might be tempted at first to interpret as the self-indulgent choice between two options, is in fact the reluctant choice of an emotionally blackmailed man. He 'wanted to go to Greece'; but, since Teresa had left her husband for him, he was obliged to sacrifice his own wishes (he could not 'indulge them', italics added), to the demands of his immediate domestic duty. Yet he had repeatedly told her that 'a man ought to do something more for society than write verses'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover she was fully aware, as she herself admits, of 'his sublime aspirations after glory - that is to say, the happiness he should experience in being not a ruler, but a guide and benefactor of humanity'.<sup>3</sup> (A fine and highly apposite observation in the present context.) Nonetheless, this did not prevent her from hindering those 'sublime aspirations'. Hence in his own turn, and at a time when he had committed himself to the Greek cause, Byron could himself remark with justice that, were he leaving Teresa 'for another woman - she might have cause to complain - but really - when a man merely wishes to go on a great duty for a good cause - this selfishness on the part of the "feminine" is rather too much'.<sup>4</sup> The obstacle that Teresa presented to Byron cannot be too

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1. Byron: The Last Journey. New Edition, with a Supplementary Chapter (London: Constable, 1940), p. 73.
  2. Moore, p. 953. Byron said much the same thing to Dr. Alexander as well in 1823: 'a man ought to do something more for mankind than write verses.', Marchand, III, p. 1052.
  3. Lord Byron jugé par les témoins de sa Vie. My Recollections of Lord Byron, and those of Eye-witnesses of his Life. Countess Guiccioli. Translated by Hubert E.H. Jerningham. 2 vols. (London, 1869), II, p. 41. The emphasis is Teresa's.
  4. To John Cam Hobhouse, May 19, 1823, LJ. X, 178.

greatly stressed, as his letters demonstrate,<sup>1</sup> and as has been well-documented by Professor Marchand.<sup>2</sup> For, besides being easily swayed emotionally, Byron loathed the upheaval of moving ('all the sweat, dust, and blasphemy of an universal packing',<sup>3</sup>) and was anyhow not at all sanguine as to what he might really be able to do in Greece once he got up there.<sup>4</sup> In view of this, it says much for Byron's strong-mindedness that, despite such personal ties and his own misgivings, he managed to master himself and, as promised, 'go up to the Levant in July'.<sup>5</sup>

But Byron was also impelled by another factor. The London Greek Committee, formed in January 1823, held its first meeting on February 23, 1823.<sup>6</sup> Edward Blaquiere was commissioned to go to Greece in order to ascertain the true state of affairs there and to report to the Committee how it might best assist the cause.<sup>7</sup> Hobhouse, who was a member of the Committee, suggested that he should call on Byron to enlist his support. After Blaquiere's visit, Byron's immediate reaction was to offer to go to Greece in person, if he 'might be of use', but he had 'no wish either to shine - or to appear officious'.<sup>8</sup> Later in the month, he writes again to Hobhouse saying 'Pray tell me what you think that I should do'; he wanted to be 'of some real service' to the cause, or somehow 'to put forward the views of the Committee and the Greek People'.<sup>9</sup>

1. E.g. to John Bowring, May 12, 1823, LJ. X, 168; To the Earl of Blessington, May 23, 1823, LJ. X, 183.
2. Marchand, III, chapter xxvi, pp. 1062/1090. See also Origo, The Last Attachment, chapter 8, pp. 337/349.
3. To Moore, September 19, 1821, LJ. VIII, 214.
4. E.g. To Douglas Kinnaird, May 24, 1823, LJ. X, 184; to Edward Church, June 21, 1823, LJ. X, 202.
5. To John Cam Hobhouse, April 7, 1823, LJ. X, 142. Byron was not always one for sticking to his fixtures but he faithfully boarded the brig Hercules on July 13, 1823.
6. Nicolson, Byron: The Last Journey, p. 67; Marchand, III, p. 1061.
7. His subsequent report which was read to the Committee on September 13, 1823, consists of twenty-two pages, and a later supplementary six pages, of what, saving one or two material suggestions, Byron would have called 'cant'. Report on the Present State of The Greek Confederation, and On its Claims to the Support of the Christian World. Edward Blaquiere. London, 1823.
8. To John Cam Hobhouse, April 7, 1823, LJ. X, 142/143.
9. April 17, 1823, LJ. X, 151/152.

The point is that Byron understood that here was a real forum in which he could act like his own Israel Bertuccio, 'in trust'<sup>1</sup> between England and her interests and Greece. With the weight of his country behind him, he carried the responsibilities of a diplomat (or at least, was prepared to do so). And indeed, his initial suggestions to John Bowring, the secretary of the London Greek Committee, were sound and practical:

The principal material wanted by the Greeks appears to be - 1st, a park of field Artillery - light - and fit for Mountain service - 2dly. Gunpowder - 3dly. hospital or Medical Stores ... the attention of the Committee had better perhaps be directed to the employment of Officers of experience - than the enrolment of raw British Soldiers - which latter are apt to be unruly and not very serviceable - in irregular warfare - by the side of foreigners.<sup>2</sup>

This is Byron the man giving realistic advice. Knowing the character of the Greeks from his earlier pilgrimage with Hobhouse in 1809/1811, knowing that they were an unruly crowd who could 'so modify a No - to a yes - and vice versa ... that prevarication may be carried to any extent',<sup>3</sup> he recognized the benefit they would gain from the discipline of experienced leaders. He emphasized to Bowring that anyone coming to Greece would have to understand that it was a 'country of all kinds of privations', and that none could expect 'a party of pleasure - or to enjoy full pay - speedy promotion and a very moderate degree of duty'.<sup>4</sup> He would not point out the advantages that would accrue to England were the Greeks successful, 'because I feel persuaded that the first object of the Committee - is their emancipation'.<sup>5</sup> He was soon to be disabused, if not of the integrity of the Committee, certainly of its energy and exertions on behalf of the cause, and the decency of its conduct towards him.<sup>5</sup>

1. Marino Falliero, II, 11, 184.
2. To John Bowring, May 12, 1823, LJ. X, 169/170.
3. Journal in Cephalonia, LJ. XI, 33.
4. To John Bowring, May 12, 1823, LJ. X, 170.
5. Ibid.
6. To what extent the Committee, composed of Whigs and other Liberals and Radicals, was exploiting the Greek issue as a political instrument to undermine the policies of the established Tory government, has been well-documented and discussed by C.M. Woodhouse, The Philhellenes. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969). See also, William St. Clair, That Greece Might Still be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence. (Oxford University Press, 1972). David Howarth, The Greek Adventure. Lord Byron and Other Eccentrics in the War of Independence. (London: Collins, 1976), though admirable in its way, should be read with circumspection.



Every letter that Byron wrote to Bowring or to his friends on the London Greek Committee (Hobhouse and Kinnaird), reiterates his wish not 'to be officious or to invest myself with authority - but merely to do as I am bid'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as he complained to Hobhouse, he heard 'nothing from - nor little of them'.<sup>2</sup> And a week before he was due to sail he wrote somewhat despairingly, 'It would have given me pleasure to have had some more defined instructions before I went - but these of course rest at the option of the Committee.'<sup>3</sup> The latter part of this sentence was suitably barbed.

Nonetheless, despite the silence of the Committee and with the prospect only of a factious Greek populace before him, Byron proceeded to Cephalonia where he remained for five months. It was during his stay here that false reports were circulated in England as to what he was doing; and Moore rather tactlessly wrote to him saying that he heard that 'instead of pursuing heroic and warlike adventures, he was residing in a delightful villa, continuing "Don Juan"'.<sup>4</sup> Such an accusation must have infuriated Byron, who had earlier said to Gamba, 'Poetry should occupy the idle. In more serious affairs it would be ridiculous',<sup>5</sup> and his somewhat tetchy reply to Moore is, as Marchand points out, 'cooler than usual'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, historians have judged Byron's hesitation in Cephalonia as shrewdly tactical, and Gordon goes so far as to say:

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1. To Douglas Kinnaird, May 23, 1823, LJ. X, 187.
  2. To John Cam Hobhouse, June 19, 1823, LJ. X, 200.
  3. To John Bowring, July 7, 1823, LJ. X, 210.
  4. Moore, p. 1015n. See also, Count Peter Gamba, A Narrative of Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece (Paris: Galignani, 1825), p. 48.
  5. A Narrative. p. 45.
  6. To Thomas Moore, March 4, 1824, LJ. XI, 125 and note.

It is to be regretted that he did not remain six months longer either in Italy or Cefalonia [sic], instead of entering upon the scene at a period of civil war, penury, and anarchy, when the Executive was living on shipboard, and none would second his views. If his crusade had been postponed to the month of June, he would have found a stronger government, a more united nation, and an opportunity for active exertion.<sup>1</sup>

Byron's reasons for delaying at Cephalaria were not, as Harold Nicolson says, 'mainly because he flinched from the responsibilities which he visualised so clearly', though it is true that he may have been 'acutely torturingly diffident'.<sup>2</sup> The reasons were the very ones he himself gave: because no directive was forthcoming from the London Greek Committee,<sup>3</sup> and because of the situation of the Greeks on the mainland. As he was to repeat again and again, 'I will have nothing to do with their factions - unless to reconcile them if possible'.<sup>4</sup> That Byron was under considerable pressure from the various Greek parties is evident from what Count Gamba has to record: 'It is easier to conceive than to relate the various means employed to engage him in one faction or the other: letters, messengers, intrigues and recriminations - nay, each faction had its agents exerting every art to degrade its opponent'.<sup>5</sup> Yet he refused to join any one faction because he felt that if he did so he would merely further the dissensions amongst the Greeks: 'it must be the Cause - and not individuals or parties that I endeavour to benefit'.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, Byron was putting into practice that policy of union which he had urged the Italians to follow in The Prophecy of Dante.<sup>7</sup> and which their failing to do so had, as Byron experienced, led to the collapse of their enterprise. As he warned the provisional General

1. Thomas Gordon, History of the Greek Revolution, 2 vols. (London, 1832), II, 117/118. See also George Finlay, A History of Greece, New Edition, edited by H.F. Tozer, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1877), vols. VI and VII. See also Marchand, III, p. 1123 and Julius Millingen, Memoirs of the Affairs of Greece (London, 1831), pp. 32/33.
2. Byron: The Last Journey, p. 155.
3. See Journal in Cephalonia, LJ. XI, 29/35; also To John Bowring, November 29, 1823, LJ. XI, 65.
4. To Charles F. Barry, October 25, 1823, LJ. XI, 54. See also Journal in Cephalonia, LJ. XI, 32.
5. Moore, 968. See also Julius Millingen, Memoirs of the Affairs of Greece. London, 1831, pp. 20/21.
6. To John Cam Hobhouse, October 6, 1823, LJ. XI, 39. See also, Gamba, A Narrative, p. 32, and Millingen, Memoirs, p. 33.
7. The Prophecy of Dante, II, 131/145. He had expressed similar sentiments to the Greeks in Don Juan III, 'The Isles of Greece', 14: 'In native swords and native ranks/The only hope of courage dwells'.

Government of Greece: 'I must admit to you frankly that if some kind of order and union is not confirmed, all hopes for a loan will be lost, - any assistance that Greece might expect from abroad, ... will be suspended, and maybe even stopped,' and those European countries at present sympathetic to the cause 'will be persuaded that the Greeks are not capable of governing themselves and will arrange some means for putting an end to your disorder'.<sup>1</sup> The admonitory, even threatening tone here was suitable not only to the urgency of the crisis, but also to the nature of the Greeks as Byron understood them: their internecine squabbling was childish, and as children they would only listen to persuasion couched in firm and severe language.<sup>2</sup> To Prince Mavrocordatos, Byron's eloquence was even more emphatic:

It pains me exceedingly to hear that the internal dissensions of Greece still continue - and at a time when she could triumph everywhere, as she has triumphed in some places. Greece now faces these three courses - to win her liberty, to become a Colony of the sovereigns of Europe, or to become a Turkish province. - - Now she can choose one of the three - but civil war cannot lead to anything but the last two. If she envies the fate of Wallachia or of the Crimea she can obtain it tomorrow; if that of Italy, the day after tomorrow. But if Greece wants to become forever free, true, and independent she had better decide now, or never again will she have the chance, never again.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this being a translation from the original Italian,<sup>4</sup> in which language Byron always addressed Mavrocordatos, the passage as a whole has much in common with Byron's style of oratory. The salient issue is disunion ('dissensions'); yet the argument, the exempla ('Wallachia', 'the Crimea', 'Italy') and the emphatic repetitions, 'now' ('ora'), 'never again' ('non avrà più tempo - mai più'), give it the polemical force characteristic of his speeches. And the careful structuring of the second paragraph contributes to this. There are 'three courses', given in descending order; Greece at present ('now') has the

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1. To the General Government of Greece, October 30, 1823, LJ. XI, 69.
  2. Cf. Journal in Cephalonia, LJ. XI, 33.
  3. To Prince Alexander Mavrocordatos, December 2, 1823, LJ. XI, 71.
  4. The original is given in LJ. XI, 70/71.

choice between them, but her continued 'dissensions' will deprive her of any choice whatsoever ('civil war cannot lead to anything but the last two'); then the three exempla, scornfully recited, with the subtle governing verb 'envies' ('invidia') lending weight to the contempt; then the 'But' ('Ma'), which returns us to what Greece 'wants to become' ('se vorrà divenir la Grecia'),<sup>1</sup> and the pressing necessity of her choosing now. It is a fine passage, significantly underscoring the gravity with which Byron is adopting his statesman-like role.

However, faction in the Greek quarter was not his only problem. The London Greek Committee seemed to show a distinct lack of judgement both as to the nature of the war being waged, and as to the suitability of supplies such a war demanded:

The Supplies of the Committee are some useful - and all excellent in their kind - but occasionally hardly practical enough - in the present state of Greece - for instance the Mathematical instruments are thrown away - none of the Greeks know a problem from a poker - we must conquer first - and plan afterwards. - The use of the trumpets too may be doubted - unless Constantinople were Jericho - for the Hellenists have no ear for Bugles - and you must send us somebody to listen to them. - We will do our best - and I pray you to stir your English hearts at home to more general exertion - for my part - I will stick by the cause ...<sup>2</sup>

In the circumstances this is exceedingly tactfully put; yet the sarcasm and exasperation, though submerged and controlled, are apparent throughout. Clearly the supplies were neither realistic nor appropriate, and were a lot less 'useful' than Byron generously pretends that they were.<sup>3</sup> The allusion to 'Jericho' for instance, while humorous on the surface, is covertly barbed: 'trumpets', whether or not blown by seven priests and in accordance with Divine instruction, would not bring down the walls of Constantinople. Nor were the 'Mathematical instruments' calculated to help win the war. Byron's priorities, on the other hand, were in the right order and practical as befitted the situation: 'we must conquer first - and plan afterwards'. Action now, paper-work and planning later. The initial task was fighting, and gaining the

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1. Prothero's translation is more correct here: 'If she wishes to become truly Greece', Prothero. VI, 293.
  2. To John Bowring, December 26, 1823, LJ. XI, 83.
  3. For confirmation of this, see, for example, William Parry, The Last Days of Lord Byron (London, 1825), pp.186/189.

independence of the Greeks; their government, education and re-organization could then follow.

Unfortunately however, this was not how Colonel Stanhope, who had been sent out by the London Greek Committee to act as coadjutor with Byron and Mavrocordatos, chose to view the matter. As Parry records with obvious contempt, the 'lofty thoughts' that occupied the mind of the Committee's 'agent', as Stanhope styled himself, were plans for the regeneration of the Greeks according to the principles of 'the finest genius of the most enlightened age. - the immortal Bentham'.<sup>1</sup> He had 'a constitution cut and dried', and plans for establishing schools, Utilitarian societies and newspapers.<sup>2</sup> He was proud to have founded the Greek Free Press - a constant source of irritation to Byron - and, after one week at Missolonghi, he was writing to the Committee asking for supplies that hardly seem to coincide with those which Byron had requested.<sup>3</sup>

Money is what I want here; a little from the committee, a little from the Quakers. Schools, presses, posts, hospitals, all will then flourish. Elementary books on education, war, agriculture, etc., newspapers, useful pamphlets, Greek Bibles, the Monthly Repository, medical stores, blankets, bandages, matter for the press, and two schoolmasters, to teach the Lancastrian system, all are much required.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from certain items here this is almost laughable: books, presses, schoolmasters - these were hardly the materials with which a war of independence was to be won, let alone fought. "It is odd enough", Byron observed to Gamba, "that Stanhope, the soldier, is all for writing down the Turks; and I, the writer, am all for fighting them down".<sup>5</sup> It was indeed 'odd'; but the contrast between their respective means of serving the cause only brings into greater relief the 'just views of human nature and practical good sense'.<sup>6</sup>

1. Parry, The Last Days of Lord Byron, p. 237.
2. Ibid., p. 270.
3. See, to John Bowring, May 12, 1823, LJ. X, 169/170.
4. Parry, The Last Days of Lord Byron, pp. 269/270.
5. Gamba, A Narrative, p. 134.
6. Moore, p. 1006.

Byron exhibited when confronted with the reality of action. For here was no place for idealism or illusions; theories and Utilitarian philosophy were useless without Congreve rockets, gunpowder and artillery, and men disciplined into using them all properly.

The difference in attitudes between Byron and Stanhope, particularly with regard to the newspaper project, became an extraordinarily contentious issue; and almost all contemporary commentators agree that Byron's was the shrewd attitude, displaying the utmost clarity of vision. Gordon, for example, writes that Byron understood immediately

the character of the people he was amongst, and the nature of their most urgent wants. Conceiving that the essential point was emancipating them from the Turks, and that this was to be done by promoting concord, and improving their military organization, he employed for those purposes all the influence of his name, talents, and riches, and no crosses could make him swerve from the path he had marked out for himself. ... Colonel Stanhope, as sincere in his wish to do good to Greece, took quite a different view of the mode in which she ought to be assisted ... . A zealous disciple of Mr. Bentham, neglecting the present crisis to gaze upon an imaginary future, he turned the question upside down, and began at the wrong end.<sup>1</sup>

To be fair, Stanhope was not entirely to be blamed. The Committee itself was heavily biased towards the Utilitarian gospel, and, indeed, Jeremy Bentham was one of its principal and most influential members. As Gordon infers and as he later states, Stanhope with all his good qualities and intentions regrettably 'visited Greece ten years too soon.'<sup>2</sup>

But it was not only on account of newspapers and Utilitarianism that Byron and Stanhope crossed. At Missolonghi, Byron and Mavrocordatos were acting together, and proceeding cautiously, in harmony with the provisional Government of Western Greece. But in Eastern Greece, and centred at Athens,

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1. Gordon, History of the Greek Revolution. II, p. 107/108. See also, Finlay, A History of Greece, VI, p. 327; Gamba, A Narrative, p. 134; Millingen, Memoirs of the Affairs of Greece, pp. 81/82, 92/93; Moore, pp. 1005/1007; Parry, The Last Days of Lord Byron, pp. 186/189. But see also, Colonel Leicester Stanhope, Greece in 1823 and 1824 (London, 1825), passim.
  2. Gordon, History. II, p. 108.

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  2. Gordon, History, II, p. 108.

was the principal opposing Greek faction led by the chief Odysseus. Odysseus, an unscrupulous self-seeker, was not concerned at all about the Greek cause: he had betrayed it on more than one occasion and was to do so again.<sup>1</sup> Trelawny, however, who had come over from Italy with Byron but, being an impatient adventurer, had since gone on to Athens, had been captivated by the glamour of Odysseus. And when Stanhope left Missolonghi for Athens on February 21, 1824, he too was seduced by Odysseus and became an enthusiastic supporter. There was thus a division in the English ranks. As Parry relates:

Towards the end of February, ... Colonel Stanhope departed for Athens; and though this relieved Lord Byron from some personal altercations, ... it made a sort of open division among the English in Greece. Henceforth there were two head-quarters for them, two commissioners from the Greek committee having different views, and steering different courses, and each attached to a different interest and different party among the Greeks. ... Henceforth all that Byron had done was to be undone and what he was doing was to be opposed.<sup>2</sup>

The point here is not to discredit Stanhope, but to show how Byron was now, in addition to his other problems, faced with the difficult task of mediator, trying to heal breaches between not only recalcitrant Greek factions but the English party as well. Although he received several overtures from Trelawny and Stanhope urging him to accept Odysseus' proposal for a congress at Salona, he was circumspect. According to Nicolson, this congress, the ostensible object of which was 'to unite the interests of Eastern and Western Greece', was in fact a ploy by Odysseus 'to assassinate Mavrocordato, and to secure Byron for himself', - and they were aware of it.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Byron eventually agreed to the invitation guardedly; but it seems that he did so because he felt that it was worth risking 'any proposition for the advantage of Greece.'<sup>4</sup> For he

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1. See, for example, Nicolson, Byron: The Last Journey, pp. 232, 236, 278.
  2. Parry, The Last Days of Lord Byron, p. 84.
  3. Nicolson, Byron: The Last Journey, pp. 233, 236.
  4. To Colonel Leicester Stanhope, March 19, 1824, LJ, XI, 137.



realized that the internal discord already prevalent amongst the Greeks could only be aggravated by faction amongst the English. If the authority of the English were undermined, then all hopes for the liberation of Greece would be lost; for the Greeks would hold them in mirthless contempt. In this connection, Gamba records a highly significant statement made by Byron concerning their forthcoming expedition to Lepanto, (which, in the event, was frustrated, partly because the Committee had not provided Parry with the proper equipment, but more particularly because of the avaricious demands of the Greeks):

He owned he had no great confidence in his troops; and yet he must make use of them, as he had no better; and, in order to make these better, he had no other way than to obtain their confidence by showing that he had confidence in them. "Above all," he added, "these semibarbarians should never entertain the least suspicion of your personal courage."<sup>1</sup>

This is admirably judicious and perceptive, and is indicative both of the self-control and patience Byron exhibited in Greece and of the manner in which he instructed those for whom he was responsible. The central feature is that of leadership by example. Whatever personal feelings or misgivings he might foster and express in private had to be suppressed if he were to maintain his influence in public. If he wanted loyal and courageous troops then he first had to show that he was trusting and courageous himself: any concern with self must be subordinate to the role.

But Byron's persuasion by example was not confined to the Greeks only. In January, 1824, he had returned four Turkish prisoners to Yusuff Pasha 'without conditions', but in the hopes that any Greeks that might 'fall into the hands of the Mussulmans' would be treated 'with humanity'.<sup>2</sup> In February he sent twenty-four Turks he had discovered at Missolonghi to the British Consul at Prevesa, with the following covering letter:

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1. Gamba, A Narrative, p. 111.

2. To Yusuff Pasha, January 23, 1824, LJ. XI, 97/99.

Coming to Greece, one of my principal objects was to alleviate as much as possible the miseries incident to a warfare so cruel as the present. When the dictates of humanity are in question, I know no difference between Turks and Greeks. It is enough that those who want assistance are men, in order to claim the pity and protection of the meanest pretender to humane feelings. ... The best recompense I can hope for would be to find that I had inspired the Ottoman commanders with the same sentiments towards those unhappy Greeks who may hereafter fall into their hands.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, according to Gordon, the Yusuff Pasha merely 'thanked him for his kindness, but never thought of imitating it.'<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, such disinterested humanitarianism is eloquent of Byron's comprehensive vision of liberty. The cause, the struggle for independence and the necessary fighting and hardships it involved, did not preclude the display of ordinary human compassion. Freedom should not be bought with barbarism. In Childe Harold, he had expressed his revulsion at the excesses of the French Revolution in as suitably disgusted terms: 'But France got drunk with blood to vomit crime,/And fatal have her Saturnalia been/To Freedom's cause'.<sup>3</sup> And although he was certainly aware that 'Revolutions are not to be made with Rose-water',<sup>4</sup> yet in his Detached Thoughts (1821/1822), he records his esteem for the Americans for having 'acquired their freedom by firmness without excess'.<sup>5</sup> Here in Greece, he was attempting to emulate that example, by humanizing the ugly trade of war and tempering firmness with restraint. Yet his compassion was not restricted to any one nation or people: it did not discriminate between 'Turks and Greeks', it embraced 'men'. Importantly then, Byron was putting into practice a theme ubiquitous in his poetry but expressed most succinctly in Don Juan: 'The drying up a single tear has more/Of honest fame than shedding seas of gore.'<sup>6</sup> Indeed

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1. To Mr. Mayer [February 21, 1824?], LJ. XI, 118.
  2. Gordon, History of the Greek Revolution, II, p. 110.
  3. CHP. IV, 97, PW. II, 156.
  4. To John Murray, April 16, 1820, LJ. VII, 77.
  5. LJ. IX, 17.
  6. DJ. VIII, 3.

Ruskin, to advance his excellent argument that Byron 'was the first great Englishman who felt the cruelty of war, and in its cruelty, its shame', cites this very couplet as evidence of Byron's 'compassion'.<sup>1</sup> And he adds, with no doubt intentional literalism: 'In Byron the indignation, the sorrow, and the effort are joined to the death'.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the concerns of his poetry became such articles of faith to Byron that he was prepared to die for them.

In his Preface to the First Edition (1924) of Byron: The Last Journey. Harold Nicholson maintains that 'Lord Byron accomplished nothing at Missolonghi except his own suicide; but by that single act of heroism he secured the liberation of Greece.'<sup>3</sup> This has surprising elements of truth as well as falsehood. Certainly by his 'single act of heroism' Byron effectively 'secured the liberation of Greece' and hastened the Battle of Navarino (1827). And no doubt too, had he 'deserted the Hellenic cause in February 1824 ... the whole history of South-eastern Europe would have developed differently.'<sup>4</sup> This is shrewd and just, and extremely gracious praise. But 'accomplished nothing' and 'suicide'? This is not so satisfactory. For indeed, Byron 'accomplished' a great deal at Missolonghi - not least, his choosing to go there in the first place. The final chapter will discuss Byron's choice and commitment to action in more literary terms; and it will offer a different, more symbolic interpretation of this 'suicide'. But, as may be inferred from the progression of this chapter, we have come a long way from poetry and the 'spectator' status of the poet to the participatory role of the man of action. And this is the pertinent criterion. For ultimately Byron, with the most consummate practical effort

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1. The Works of John Ruskin. Edited by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), XXXIV, p. 328.
  2. *Ibid.*, p. 344. italics added.
  3. Byron: The Last Journey. op. cit., p. ix.
  4. *Ibid.*, pp. ix/x.

and with laudable diplomacy, put into action all that he had ever written about liberty, unity, compassion and self-denial as a poet. As Adam Mickiewicz was later to write:

Lord Byron commence l'ère de la poésie nouvelle; lui, le premier, a fait sentir aux hommes tout le sérieux de la poésie; on a vu qu'il fallait vivre d'après ce qu'on écrit; que le désir, que la parole, ne suffisent pas; on a vu ce poète riche et élevé dans un pays aristocratique quitter le parlement et sa patrie pour servir la cause des Grecs. Ce besoin profondément senti de rendre la vie poétique, de rapprocher ainsi l'idéal du réel, constitue tout le mérite poétique de Byron.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Adam Mickiewicz, Les Slaves: cours professé au Collège de France (1842-1844) (Paris: Musée Adam Mickiewicz, 1914), p. 19.

## CHAPTER 2

### ORATORY AND THE HOUSE OF LORDS

Byron's position in the history of English Literature is unique: a great and popular poet, yet an hereditary Peer for a time seriously engaged in practical politics. In this chapter we shall look at his activity in the House of Lords, bearing in mind such questions as why he spoke, whether he was successful and why he stopped speaking. The prelude which follows is an attempt to give some sort of framework to the subsequent discussion.

#### Poetry and Oratory

In a recent collection of essays, Philip Hobsbaum argues that in the time of Milton the 'governing tradition in poetry was declamatory, suited to the arena of debate. It is poetry where narrative structure, amongst other advantages, is likely to be sacrificed in the interests of argument.' 'This he calls 'the poetry of debate', and maintains that it reached both its decadence and conclusion in Byron.<sup>1</sup> This is interesting; for a number of 19th century writers regarded Byron's poetry in much the same light - as, in Hobsbaum's terminology, 'argument', 'declamatory', 'the poetry of debate', - and tended to define poetry by contrasting it with its kinsman - eloquence or oratory. Two such are Mill and Newman, and their discussions will perhaps throw some light on the nature of oratory.

Mill distinguishes poetry from eloquence in terms of audience:

Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling. But ... eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude ... Eloquence is feeling pouring itself out to other minds, courting their sympathy, or endeavouring to influence their belief or move them to passion or to action. All poetry is in the nature of a soliloquy.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry (London, MacMillan, 1979), pp. 157/179.
  2. John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" (1833, revised 1859) English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century), Selected and edited by Edmund D. Jones (Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 406.

These sentiments strongly echo those of Shelley in his Defence:

A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds. His auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, despite the 'solitude' and the self-communion, even here Shelley at least imagines an audience and evidently hopes his song will have some salutary effect upon those who hear it. We may also remember that Wordsworth himself (Mill's tutelary poet) spoke of the poet as 'a man speaking to men',<sup>2</sup> and that each of the compositions in Lyrical Ballads had 'a worthy purpose'.<sup>3</sup> Aware of this, perhaps, Mill modifies his claim of the poet's 'utter unconsciousness of a listener', and makes his distinction between poetry and eloquence more specific:

When the act of utterance is not itself the end, but a means to an end, - viz. by the feelings he himself expresses, to work upon the feelings, or upon the belief, or the will, of another, - when the expression of his emotions, or of his thoughts tinged by his emotions, is tinged also by that purpose, by that desire of making an impression upon another mind, then it ceases to be poetry, and becomes eloquence.<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis added here is motivation: where any utterance is so regulated or calculated as to produce an anticipated emotional effect upon its listeners at the time of composition or utterance, then it is eloquence. Perhaps we may say therefore that eloquence is the art of he who presupposes an audience and accommodates his expressions thereto; whereas in poetry, the poet may suppose an audience but utters his feelings irrespective of it.

Now, in Hints from Horace (1811, 1821, pub. 1831), Byron shows how central what Mill would call eloquence is to his poetry:

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1. The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Newly edited by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. 10 Vols. (London, 1965), VII, 116.
  2. Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802). Lyrical Ballads. Edited by R.L. Brett and A. R. Jones. (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 255.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
  4. John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" (1833, revised 1859). English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century). Selected and edited by Edmund D. Jones. (Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 407.

'Tis not enough, ye bards, with all your art,  
To polish poems - they must touch the heart!  
Where'er the scene be laid, whate'er the song,  
Still let it bear the hearer's soul along;  
Command your audience, or to smile or weep,  
Whiche'er may please you, any thing but sleep.  
The poet claims our tears - but, by his leave,  
Before I shed them, let me see him grieve.

135/142.

Clearly, the relationship between poet and audience is imperative for as it had been for Horace

Byron<sup>1</sup> 'Command your audience' is the crucial phrase: the poet must not merely be aware of his listeners, but must exercise emotional control over them - emotional, be it noted, not rational, logical or formal persuasion (this will have more relevance when we get to his speeches). The plea for authenticity in the final two lines does, however, agree with Mill's implicit plea for the same. Byron continues:

Two objects always should the poet move  
Or one, or both, to please, or to improve.  
Whate'er you teach be brief - if you design  
For our remembrance your didactic line,  
Redundance places Memory on the rack,  
For brains may be o'erloaded - like the back.

529/534

The object of Mill's essay is to dismiss the very didacticism that Byron here claims for poetry. Mill objected to poetry which, in Keats' words has 'a palpable design upon us'.<sup>1</sup> He belongs to that literary school which Abrams has seen as having an 'expressive' as opposed to a 'pragmatic' orientation.<sup>2</sup> Byron here is patently 'pragmatic', but his insistence on brevity meets with the approval of Newman who is of the same 'expressive' school as Mill. Newman, however, distinguishes poetry from eloquence (and oratory) in terms of style. Unlike Mill who refers to no poet in particular, he makes direct reference to Byron's poetry as an example of eloquence. One category of poetry, Newman states, 'will include such moralizing and philosophical poems as Young's Night Thoughts and Byron's Childe Harold':

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1. To J. H. Reynolds, 3 February 1818. Letters of John Keats. A new selection edited by Robert Gittings. (Oxford University Press, 1975). p. 61.
  2. The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition. M. H. Abrams (New York, Norton, 1958), pp. 14/26.

There is much bad taste, at present, in the judgement passed on compositions of this kind. It is the fault of the day to mistake mere eloquence for poetry; whereas, in direct opposition to the conciseness and simplicity of the poet, the talent of the orator consists in making much of a single idea. ... This is the great art of Cicero himself, who, whether he is engaged in statement, argument, or raillery, never ceases till he has exhausted the subject; going round about it, and placing it in every different light, yet without repetition to offend or weary the reader.<sup>1</sup>

This seems to be a more cogent and accessible argument than Mill's, and will provide a useful yardstick by which to measure Byron's speeches. The discursive, exhaustive and argumentative style, matches closely Hobsbaum's idea of 'the poetry of debate'. Yet Newman really regards such style as wholly alien to the art of poetry - or, as he reluctantly concedes, to 'the highest poetical excellence':

In Childe Harold, ... the writer is carried through his Spenserian stanza with the unweariness and equable fullness of accomplished eloquence; opening, illustrating, and heightening one idea, before he passes on to another. His composition is an extended funeral oration over buried joys and pleasures. His laments over Greece, Rome, and the fallen in various engagements, have quite the character of panegyrical orations ... Still it is a work of splendid talent, though, as a whole, not of the highest poetical excellence. Juvenal is, perhaps, the only ancient author who habitually substitutes declamation for poetry.<sup>2</sup>

(This last remark is shrewder than Newman himself perhaps realized, if we remember that English Bards and Scotch Reviewers is self-consciously Juvenalian.) Brevity is such an important criterion for Newman that he adds a footnote here to emphasize his point. Citing a passage from a contemporary play, he observes: 'The idea is good, and if expressed in a line or two, might have been poetry - spread out into nine or ten lines, it yields but a languid and ostentatious declamation.'<sup>3</sup>

The facility with which poetry may become oratory is pertinent in the

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1. John Henry Newman, 'Poetry with reference to Aristotle's Poetics'. English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century). Selected and edited by Edmund D. Jones (Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 242/243.
  2. *Ibid.*, pp. 243/244.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 244.



present context. In so far as both Mill and Newman recognize that eloquence or oratory can be mistaken for poetry, and feel compelled therefore to distinguish the one from the other, they imply a proximity between the two (a point which we shall see Byron himself acknowledging). This proximity and the facility with which the poet may become an orator, lead us to the more practical aspersions concerning Byron made by Goethe and Sheridan. Both Sheridan and Goethe detect in Byron's poetry the latent qualities of an orator. In his Detached Thoughts (1821), Byron records:

Sheridan's liking for me ... was founded upon "English Bards & S[cratching] Reviewers" ... he was sure from that and other symptoms - I should make an Orator if I would but take to speaking and grow a parliament man - he never ceased harping upon this to me - and I remember my old tutor Dr. Drury had the same notion when I was a boy.<sup>1</sup>

While Sheridan sees Parliament as a forum where Byron's poetic energies might be put to more practical and statesman-like effect, Goethe sees it as one where Byron could have rid himself of his animosity ('opposition and fault-finding'), and so redeem his poetry from its political, emotional and polemical impurities.<sup>2</sup> Parliament would have been the proper sphere for his national and political antagonism:

If Lord Byron had had an opportunity of working off all the opposition in his character by a number of strong parliamentary speeches, he would have been much more pure as a poet. But as he scarcely ever spoke in parliament, he kept within himself all his feelings against his nation; and to free himself from them he had no other means than poetry. I could call a great part of Byron's works of negation 'suppressed parliamentary speeches.'<sup>3</sup>

Although Goethe would seem to agree with Newman's opinions of Byron's poetry, both he and Sheridan notice Byron's aptitude for oratory. Their views only differ in so far as Goethe sees the poetry as profiting from a few 'strong parliamentary speeches', while Sheridan sees Byron and even parliament as profiting from his participation. The one is concerned with the Poet, the

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1. LJ. IX, 16.

2. Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann. Trans. John Oxenford. Edited by J. K. Moorhead. (London: Dent, 1930), p. 88. See also pp. 118, 378, and 425/426.

3. Ibid., p. 123.

other with the man. Moreover, they both imply, as do Mill and Newman, a similarity between poetry and oratory - something which Byron also recognized:

I coincide with you in opinion that the poet yields to the Orator, but as nothing can be done in the latter Capacity till the expiration of my minority, the former occupies my present Attention; & both ancients & moderns, have declared, that the 2 pursuits are so nearly similar, as to require in a great measure the same Talents, & he who excels in the one, would on application succeed in the other. - Lyttleton, Glover, & Young (who was a celebrated Preacher & a Bard) are instances of the kind, Sheridan & Fox also, these are great names, I may imitate, I can never equal them.<sup>1</sup>

While to some extent Byron may be trying to mollify his anxious solicitor John Hanson, by justifying his present occupation of writing poetry, he nonetheless sees poetry as a valuable preparation for the greater art of oratory. (His mention of Young here seems to give gratuitous support to Newman's aspersions). Poetry is, so to speak, practice for oratory; but the difference between the two seems to turn on the word 'application'. This suggests both the effort necessary to adopting an active role (applying oneself to something), and the transmuting of the written word into the active word (applying the 'Word'), and matches Sheridan's 'would but take to speaking and grow a parliament man' (italics added). This 'application' then, is the adaptation of both the use of the word, and of one's role. Furthermore it seems to involve the same personal shift that Sheridan and Goethe imply: that of progressing from an isolated critical stance (Goethe's 'he kept within himself all his feelings against his nation'), to one within a context - in Sheridan's words, 'grow a parliament man' (italics added). However, to make such a movement, to become a 'parliament' man, required compromises which Byron was not prepared to make (as we shall see). Matthew Arnold has acutely observed:

Byron himself gave the preference, he tells us, to politicians and doers, far above writers and singers. But the politics of his own day, and of his own class - even of the Liberals of his own class, - were impossible for him. Nature had not formed him for a Liberal

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1. To John Hanson, April 2, 1807, LJ. I, 113.

peer, proper to move the Address in the House of Lords, to pay compliments to the energy and self-reliance of British middle-class liberalism, and to adapt his politics to suit it. Unfitted for such politics, he threw himself upon poetry as his organ; and in poetry his topics were ... the upholders of the old order, ... the canters and traplers of the great world, ... his enemies and himself.<sup>1</sup>

Here Arnold covertly agrees with Newman, and overtly with Goethe (by whom he was much influenced): Byron resorted to poetry as a vehicle for political canvassing; his poetry is his oratory - the speeches he never made, or, as Goethe has it "suppressed parliamentary speeches".

In an important sense then, Newman, Sheridan, Goethe and Arnold regard Byron's poetry as sublimated oratory: despite their different approaches, they seem united in their view of Byron's incipient aptitude for oratory.

'But', Byron continues his above Detached Thought,

It never was my turn of inclination to try - I spoke once or twice as all young peers do - as a kind of introduction into public life - but dissipation - shyness - haughty and reserved opinions - together with the short time I lived in England - after my majority (only about five years in all) prevented me from resuming the experiment - as far as it went it was not discouraging - particularly my first speech ... but just after it my poem of C/hilde/ H/arold/ was published - & nobody ever thought about my prose afterwards, nor indeed did I - it became to me a secondary and neglected object, though I sometimes wonder to myself if I should have succeeded.<sup>2</sup>

The opening statement here is a Byronic exaggeration (i.e. untrue), and leads us right back to his early interest in parliament and oratory. For, most certainly he had had an 'inclination' to try 'the experiment', and from a very early age. Moore records Byron's admitted detestation for poetry when a boy ('I could never bear to read any poetry whatever without disgust and reluctance'<sup>3</sup>), and elsewhere relates an anecdote that indicates Byron's precocious ambition even before he came into the title, that is, before the age of ten: to a visitor who had said she looked forward to reading his speeches in the

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1. Essays in Criticism. Second series (London: Macmillan, 1935), p. 138.
  2. LJ. IX, 16.
  3. Moore, p. 199n.

House of Commons some day, he replied 'I hope not; if you read any speeches of mine, it will be in the House of Lords.'<sup>1</sup> That this predilection remained with him into his later youth is confirmed by the following Detached Thought:

At school ... My qualities were much more oratorical and martial - than poetical - and Dr. D[rury] ... had a great notion that I should turn out an Orator - from my fluency - my turbulence - my voice - my copiousness of declamation - and my action ... no one - had the least notion that I should subside into poesy.<sup>2</sup>

The use of the word 'subside' here reinforces his comment to Hanson (above) that the poet yields to the orator - that is, that poetry is inferior to action. The consistency of this view has been discussed in Chapter 1. What is interesting to note here is that what struck Drury in Byron's oratory - his 'fluency', 'turbulence', 'voice' and 'copiousness of declamation', seem to be the very qualities, together with his potential for 'action', that struck Sheridan from his poetry. Drury's 'great notion' was based upon Byron's Speech Day performances at Harrow - in which Byron himself took great pride. Clearly he was an impressive speaker, for Drury was 'economical' with his compliments.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, during the holidays from Harrow he performed in private theatricals with the Pigot family at Southwell; and the connection between the theatre (acting) and parliament (oratory) in Byron's thoughts is an important one to bear in mind. Marchand seems to suggest this in the following passage:

He dreamed of becoming a Parliamentary orator. During his London holidays he had become enamoured of the theatre, particularly of the declamation of the most eminent actors, and he had even gone into the gallery to listen to the oratory in the House of Commons.<sup>4</sup>

This is borne out by a letter Byron wrote to his sister in April 1805:

I have seen this young Roscius several times ... I think him tolerable in some characters, but by no means equal to the ridiculous praises showered upon him ... I am afraid that my stay in town ceases after the 10th. I should not continue it so long ... But, I remain on purpose to hear our Sapient and noble Legislators of Both Houses debate

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1. Moore, p. 19.

2. LJ. IX, 42/43.

3. LJ. IX, 43.

4. Byron: A Portrait. Leslie A. Marchand (London: Futura, 1976), p. 29.

on the Catholic Question, as I have no doubt there will be many nonsensical, and some Clever things said on the occasion.<sup>1</sup>

If we take this at its face value, it seems that Byron was attending the debate for the same reason, or in the same spirit, as he might go to the theatre: to be amused. Neither does his own emphasis on 'Sapient and noble Legislators' suggest much respect for the members of the Houses. But behind this flippancy there seems to be an interest not so much in the actual content or argument of the debate as in its style - the manner of declamation, the techniques of debate: the Catholic Question as such does not seem the principal attraction - not the issues raised, but the performance. Perhaps then it is fair to say that Byron was gleaning experience to further his own desire of becoming an orator. Nevertheless, the idea of entertainment, of stimulation, is crucially present, as is also by extension the similarity of Parliament to the theatre. Both these points will have important repercussions later on.

In January 1809, just before attaining his majority and taking his seat for the first time, Byron wrote to Hanson:

I shall take my seat as soon as circumstances will admit. I have not yet chosen my side in politics, nor shall I hastily commit myself with professions, or pledge my support to any man or measures, but though I shall not run headlong into opposition, I will studiously avoid a connection with ministry.<sup>2</sup> - I cannot say that my opinion is strongly in favour of either party ... I shall stand aloof, speak what I think, but not often, nor too soon, I will preserve my independence, if possible, but if involved with a party, I will take care not to be the last or least in the Ranks ... - So much for politics, of which I at present know little, & care less, by and bye, I shall use the Senatorial privilege of talking, and indeed in such times, and in such a crew, it must be difficult to hold one's tongue.<sup>3</sup>

This is the last we hear of Parliament before his return from the East. The whole passage is a curious blend of caution and egoism: indifference, refusal to compromise, isolated aloofness, yet ambition not to be an also-ran, the mocking lack of respect for 'such a crew'. This hardly promises responsible participation in the House, but if anything, how to shine within it.

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1. To Augusta Byron, April 25, 1805, LJ. I, 67.
  2. Hanson was connected with the ministry (LJ. I, 113n) - i.e. the Tory government. Byron may be being deliberately provocative here.
  3. LJ. I, 186/7.

He is not concerned about what he might do in Parliament for its benefit or the benefit of the governed - he is thinking only of himself. Despite the bravura however, some positive characteristics concerning the active role emerge: independence, integrity, leadership. Fine ideals, but at present overshadowed by a fundamental selfishness, which his travels were not to alter. Just four months after his return from the East, and with the deaths of his mother and several close friends oppressing him, Byron felt alone and restless. To his friend Francis Hodgson, he wrote on October 13th, 1811:

I am growing nervous ... really, wretchedly, ridiculously, fineladically nervous. Your climate kills me; I can neither read, write, or amuse myself, or any one else. My days are listless, and my nights restless; I have very seldom any society, and when I have, I run out of it. ... I don't know that I shan't end with insanity, for I find a want of method in arranging my thoughts that perplexes me strangely; but this looks more like silliness than madness ... I must try the hartshorn of your company; and a session of Parliament would suit me well, any thing to cure me of conjugating the accursed verb 'ennuyer'.<sup>1</sup>

This is as fair a summary of the symptoms of 'ennui' as one could hope to meet. Self-dramatization? Certainly - yet he is conscious of the 'silliness' of his predicament, which shows a capacity for self-criticism, for self-objectification. This is important, for while his tendency is to blame his condition on external phenomena ('Your climate kills me'), he reveals in every line the basic problem: the dissatisfaction of the individual bound in on himself. As he was later to write: 'To withdraw myself from myself (oh that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all'.<sup>2</sup> We have seen this before in a different context: all that need be said here is that he is looking to Parliament for a similar remedy - to get him out of himself. Parliament is now seen as a possible panacea for his 'ennui' - or what he was later to call, his "craving void";<sup>3</sup> he hopes to gain stimulation from it. Significantly he was at this time putting Childe Harold I and II in train for publication - yet even this was no 'cure' for his

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1. LJ. II, 111/112.
  2. LJ. III, 225.
  3. LJ. III, 109.

complaint. Later the same year, he wrote again to Hodgson:

I wish parliament were assembled, that I may hear, and perhaps some day be heard; - but on this point I am not very sanguine. I have many plans; - sometimes I think of the East again, and dearly beloved Greece.<sup>1</sup>

This was written only two months before his maiden speech. The tone is calmer and perhaps a certain modesty or 'shyness' is evident; but any enthusiasm is absent: parliament is now relegated to just one of his 'many plans'. The point to stress in all this is that prior to his first visit to the East, Byron, despite his arrogance, clearly regarded Parliament and the life of an Orator as a laudable and desirable activity for himself. On his return from Greece in 1811, though the activity itself remained laudable and even desirable, Byron's own desire for it was self-motivated in a peculiar way: he had tasted travel and adventure; now he wanted the constant excitement they had given him. Writing to Annabella Milbanke in September 1813, he makes a remarkably shrewd psychological point:

The great object of life is Sensation - to feel that we exist - even though in pain - it is this "craving void" which drives us to Gaming - to Battle - to Travel - to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment.<sup>2</sup>

Here 'ennui' (the "craving void") is prescribed its most perfect antidote: it is not the nature itself of the 'pursuit' that matters but the intensity of the stimulation derived from it. In such a frame of mind, Byron here looks to Parliament. Yet, when the session of Parliament began on January 15th, 1812, Byron's enthusiasm seems to have revived: 'I went down to the House & resumed my seat yesterday, I mean to try a speech but have not yet determined on my subject.'<sup>3</sup> In view of what was suggested earlier concerning his apparent interest in the style rather than the matter of a debate, it is interesting that the making of a speech should take priority over its subject.

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1. To Francis Hodgson, December 8, 1811, LJ. II, 141.
  2. To Annabella Milbanke, September 6, 1813, LJ. III, 109.
  3. To John Cam Hobhouse, January 16, 1812, LJ. II, 155.

He seems tempted more by the stimulation a speech would afford than by any burning issue he feels compelled to speak on. This is perhaps borne out by his change of intention in choice of subject between February 1st and 4th. On February 1st he wrote to Hodgson that he had not yet spoken but - 'the Catholic Question comes on this month, and perhaps I may then commence. I must "screw my courage to the sticking place," and we'll not fail.'<sup>1</sup> The quotation he makes here suggests that though he is attracted to the idea of speaking, he is nonetheless nervous ('shyness' again) of doing so. By February 4th, however, he was already giving details to Samuel Rogers as to his intended speech in the Frame Work Bill debate.<sup>2</sup>

#### Byron's Maiden Speech

For many reasons, this speech is the most interesting of the three he was to make. It is the only one about which he writes both before and after delivery; the only one upon which others commented after delivery; and the only one made before he became famous. Of further interest is that he exploded into rhyme on the success of the Bill. It is to some extent then isolated from the other two, and being his first speech - his 'introduction into public life'<sup>3</sup> - justifies some attention.

Byron's speech, delivered on February 27th, 1812, was against the Frame Work Bill - a Tory measure which aimed at introducing the death-penalty (in place of transportation) for the breakers of stocking-frames (the Luddites, as they are otherwise known), and to facilitate detection of the crime.

To choose to speak on this subject was appropriate; for the problem was rife in his own 'constituency', so to speak, of Nottinghamshire. Furthermore, since he had spent the preceding Christmas at Newstead, he had first-hand knowledge of the plight of those involved. As he wrote to Rogers:

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1. To Francis Hodgson, February 1, 1812, LJ. II, 160.
  2. To Samuel Rogers, February 4, 1812, LJ. II, 160/161.
  3. LJ. IX, 16.



From all that fell under my own observation during my Xmas visit to Newstead, I feel convinced that if conciliatory measures are not very soon adopted, the most unhappy consequences may be apprehended. - Nightly outrage & daily depredation are already at their height, & not only the masters of frames who are obnoxious on account of their occupation, but persons in no degree connected with the malcontents or their oppressors, are liable to insult & pillage.<sup>1</sup>

In this same letter, Byron states his intention of giving 'notice of a motion for a committee of enquiry', which enquiry, together with the 'conciliatory measures', he appeals for throughout his speech. Just why he sympathizes with the Frame-breakers and why he is opposed to the Bill altogether, is made plain in a letter to Lord Holland (the leader of the Whig party in the Lords and Recorder of Nottingham), written two days prior to his speech:

For my own part, I consider the manufacturers as a much injured body of men sacrificed to ye. views of certain individuals who have enriched themselves by those practices which have deprived the frameworkers of employment. - For instance; - by the adoption of a certain kind of frame 1 man performs ye. work of 7 - 6 are thus thrown out of business. - But it is to be observed that ye. work thus done is far inferior in quality, hardly marketable at home, & hurried over with a view to exportation. - Surely, my Lord, however we may rejoice in any improvements in ye. arts which may be beneficial to mankind; we must not allow mankind to be sacrificed to improvements in Mechanism. The maintenance & well doing of ye. industrious poor is an object of greater consequence to ye. community than ye. enrichment of a few monopolists by any improvement in ye. implements of trade, which deprives ye. workman of his bread, & renders ye. labourer 'unworthy of his hire'. - My own motive for opposing ye. bill is founded on its palpable injustice, & its certain inefficacy. - I have seen the state of these miserable men, & it is a disgrace to a civilized country. - Their excesses may be condemned, but cannot be subject of wonder. - The effect of ye. present bill would be to drive them into actual rebellion. ... By previous enquiry I am convinced these men would have been restored to employment & ye. country to tranquillity. ... It can never be too late to employ force in such circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

This passage is a virtual summary of the main points made in his speech and, indeed, parts of it recur almost verbatim in the speech. The issues raised are extraordinarily familiar to the modern reader: redundancy due to increasing mechanization; the enrichment of a few at the expense of the many; the implication that a labourer has a right to work and a right to defend that

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1. To Samuel Rogers, February 4, 1812, LJ. II, 161.
  2. To Lord Holland, February 25, 1812, LJ. II, 165/166.

right; the inferior quality of mass-produced goods; and trade adapted to the demands of a foreign rather than home market. While it may be thought that Byron shows a lack of realism in the face of technological advances, his humanitarianism and desire to preserve what is of essential value cannot be disputed, and places him more or less in the Cobbett school of thought. Byron regards the particular crisis of frame-breaking as an example of general demoralization. His attack on behalf of the 'industrious poor' is waged against the insurgence of a middle-class whose gods are trade and Mammon. He is countering the whole ethos of a wealth centred society, which he sees as depraving and corrupting Man and denying him his basic human dignity. The Frame-breakers illustrate the effects of Utilitarianism which, Byron considers, tends to pure materialism where in the name of progress and the greater happiness of all the interests of the many are sacrificed to those of the selfish few. This is somewhat of a rationalization of his argument; for his main emphasis is on human values: he is very much aware of the Frame-breakers as human beings. This sense is carried into his speech.

Lord Liverpool having opened the debate, Byron was the next to speak. He criticized the futile activities of the authorities in attempting to quell the disturbances and the ineffectual means to which they had reverted; in particular, the calling out of the militia, adding that: 'As the sword is the worst argument that can be used, so should it be the last. In this instance it has been the first; but providentially as yet only in the scabbard.'<sup>1</sup> He appealed for conciliation and deliberation and questioned the efficacy of the Bill and the justification for adding yet another capital punishment to the penal code. Each of these points is re-iterated by subsequent speakers for the Opposition and, indeed, in two cases Byron is specifically referred to: Lord Holland 'agreed with his noble friend (Byron) in disapproving the manner in which the military had been employed, and urged the propriety of an inquiry

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1. This and the subsequent quotations from Byron's maiden speech are taken from Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, XXI (1812).

to open the eyes of the deluded multitude.' And Lord Grenville was even more fulsome:

There never was a maxim of greater wisdom than that uttered by the noble Lord (Byron), who had so ably addressed their lordships that night for the first time, that the military ought never to be employed except in extreme cases, and then they should be effectual, if possible, rather by the terror of their appearance, than their power of execution.

However, the full force of Byron's attack is levelled at the Government's general policy, of which the Nottingham riots are merely an outcome and instance. The 'real cause of these distresses ... is the bitter policy, the destructive warfare of the last 18 years, which has destroyed their comfort, your comfort, all mens' comfort'. In a highly representative passage, he tasks the Government with its complacency and ineptitude and the discrepancy between its foreign and domestic policy:

All this has been transacting within 130 miles of London, and yet we, 'good easy men, have deemed full sure our greatness was a ripening,' and have sat down to enjoy our foreign triumphs in the midst of domestic calamity. But all the cities you have taken, all the armies which have retreated before your leaders are but paltry subjects of self congratulation, if your land divides against itself, and your dragoons and your executioners must be let loose against your fellow citizens. - You call these men a mob, desperate, dangerous, and ignorant; and seem to think that the only way to quiet the 'Bellua multorum capitum' is to lop off a few of its superfluous heads. - But even a mob may be better reduced to reason by a mixture of conciliation and firmness, than by additional irritation and redoubled penalties. Are we aware of our obligations to a mob? It is the mob that labour in your fields and serve in your houses, that man your navy, and recruit your army, that have enabled you to defy all the world, and can also defy you when neglect and calamity have driven them to despair. You may call the people a mob, but do not forget, that a mob too often speaks the sentiments of the people. And here I must remark with what alacrity you are accustomed to fly to the succour of your distressed allies, leaving the distressed of your own country to the care of Providence or - the Parish ... But doubtless our friends have too many foreign claims to admit the prospect of domestic relief; though never did such objects demand it. I have traversed the seat of war in the peninsula, I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey, but never under the most despotic of infidel governments did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return in the very heart of a Christian country. And what are your remedies? After months of inaction, and months of action worse than inactivity, at length comes forth the grand specific, the never failing nostrum of all state physicians, from the days of Draco to the present time. After feeling the pulse and shaking the head over the patient, prescribing the usual course of warm water and bleeding, the warm water of your maukish police,

and the lancets of your military, these convulsions must terminate in death, the sure consummation of the prescriptions of all political Sangrados.

This is strong and incisive stuff. Notice how strategically Byron manoeuvres his argument away from the particularities of the issue (though without ever losing sight of that issue), to generalize his attack against the government's abuse of power, and then returns from that generalization to pound home his argument all the more forcefully in the final colourful image. To a certain degree, this seems to typify Newman's ideas of eloquence and oratory: Byron is discursive yet without being wearisome. Indeed there is nothing in this passage that might 'weary' the reader at all. It is truly dramatic: there is a vivid sense of the presence of a speaker whose tone is unmistakable. Notice too, the handsome use he makes of literary effects: rhetorical questions, bathos, quotations and his unsparing irony. The final image (which he uses again with a different application in a letter to Leigh Hunt,<sup>1</sup>) though fatal perhaps in the present context, is masterful for its cogency and attention to 'le mot juste': for instance, 'nostrum' - not 'medicine' - because it connotes both political and medicinal quackery; 'lancets', because it combines the surgical instrument with the weapon ('lance'); and 'terminate', rather than 'end', because the Latinate use is weightier and perhaps suggests more the idea of a process (a lengthy and futile one in this case) coming to an end, than does the monosyllable. Notice finally, the emphatic use Byron makes of the second person singular or plural. The effect of this can best be seen from his question 'Are we aware of our obligations to a mob?' (emphasis added); to which he replies 'It is the mob that labour in your fields ...' (emphasis added). Two things happen here. Byron restores to the abstract, faceless and dehumanized 'mob' its human constituency, and dissociates himself from those who recognize no 'obligations' towards the people. The turn from 'we'

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1. To Leigh Hunt, January 29 1816, LJ. V, 19.

to 'you' and 'your' is crucial. By such an abstraction as 'a mob', a government need feel no natural compunction in its dealings with the people - the people on whom ultimately its power depends and to whom its first responsibility should be directed. And this, finally, is where Byron's criticism lies. It is not so much the government's foreign policy as such that earns his rebuke, but its seeking to secure for itself a world role at the expense of domestic stability - i.e. its neglecting its primary duty that entitles it to power: the people's trust. A government that values its reputation abroad - its international status - higher than its national prestige, is presenting a false image of power if its internal proceedings cannot sustain it. Byron is clearly suggesting 'put your own country in order before you start meddling in other countries' affairs; then you will be in a position of real authority'. The difference between the appearance and the reality of power is one of his central concerns.<sup>1</sup>

At the close of his speech, Byron rises to rhetorical brilliance. Returning to the Bill itself he concludes:

But suppose it past [*sic*]; suppose one of these men, as I have seen them - meagre with famine, sullen with despair, careless of a life which your lordships are perhaps about to value at something less than the price of a stocking-frame - suppose this man surrounded by the children for whom he is unable to procure bread at the hazard of his existence, about to be torn for ever from a family which he lately supported in peaceful industry, and which it is not his fault that he can no longer so support, suppose this man, and there are ten thousand such from whom you may select your victims, dragged into court, to be tried for this new offence, by this new law; still, there are two things wanting to convict and condemn him; and these are, in my opinion, - Twelve Butchers for a Jury, and a Jeffries for a Judge!

Magnificent! This is one sentence and the main clause is 'But suppose it past ... still there are two things wanting, etc.' - the climax being the last eleven words. Yet notice how Byron builds up to that climax by suspending it, delaying it with his reiteration of 'suppose' and his digressive sub-clauses,

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1. Compare 'Tis not mere splendour makes the show august  
To eye or heart - it is the people's trust.'  
DJ. XII, 83. The appearance and reality of power is also a recurrent theme in Marino Faliero, The Two Foscari and Sardanapalus.

and so fostering our anticipation. Such skill obeys his own prescriptions for poetry which we have seen in Hints from Horace.<sup>1</sup> and those of Mill and Newman for eloquence.

However, we shall now see what Byron himself and some of his contemporaries thought of his speech. In a letter to Hodgson a few days after its delivery, he describes its reception thus:

Lds Holland & Grenville, particularly the latter paid some high compts. in the course of their speeches ... & Ld. Eldon & Harrowby answered me. - - I have had many marvelous eulogies repeated to me since in person & by proxy from divers persons ministerial - yea ministerial! as well as oppositionists, of them I shall only mention Sir F. Burdetts. - He says it is the best speech by a Lord since the "Lord knows when" ...-Ld. H/olland/ tells me I shall beat them all if I persevere, & Ld. G/renville/ remarked that the construction of some of my periods are very like Burke's!! - And so much for vanity. - - I spoke very violent sentences with a sort of modest impudence, abused every thing & every body, & put the Ld. Chancellor very much out of humour, & if I may believe what I hear, have not lost any character by the experiment. - As to my delivery, loud & fluent enough, perhaps a little theatrical. - - I could not recognize myself or any one else in the Newspapers.<sup>2</sup>

The note of exuberance here is easy to detect; he clearly felt encouraged, and Grenville's remark could not have been more flattering. Once again it is interesting to note that in reporting these points to his friend, Byron emphasizes the effect of his manner of delivery not the matter, the style rather than the content of his speech. And perhaps he is his own best critic. For Lord Holland later recorded in his Memoirs:

His speech was full of fancy, wit, and invective, but not exempt from affectation nor well reasoned, nor at all suited to our common notions of Parliamentary eloquence. His fastidious and artificial taste and his over-irritable temper would, I think, have prevented him from ever excelling in Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

Byron would seem to corroborate this - though to some extent, it conflicts with Lord Grenville's comparison (but then Burke was no 'common' orator either). Lord Holland's 'affectation' matches Byron's 'theatrical'

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1. Hints from Horace. 135/142, 529/534.
  2. To Francis Hodgson, March 5, 1812 LJ. II, 167.
  3. Marchand. I. p. 322.

delivery, which in turn perhaps suggests that the House imposed an unnatural restraint upon him to which he responded awkwardly. Yet, if we bear in mind his youthful experience of Parliament, it seems clear that there was something inherently 'theatrical' about Parliament itself. This will be confirmed by several of his subsequent remarks. Furthermore, that he could not recognize himself when he saw his speech in cold print in the newspapers emphasizes such theatricality, and indicates his adoption of an ill-fitting role - a mask, a persona - which was unreal to him. As to Holland's criticism that Byron's speech was not 'well reasoned', perhaps a reading of the cited passages would endorse this view. For essentially, Byron's polemic rests upon an emotive appeal<sup>1</sup> - common decency, humaneness, sympathy and natural justice - rather than the dry, clinical formalities of Parliamentary and judicial procedure. The point is that Byron is intensely aware of the people as people, and their sufferings as those of real people; and, just as he will not admit their welfare inferior to improvements in mechanism, nor will he subscribe to the subjection of lives to abstractions, principle and formulae. Perhaps also Holland found the speech defective in reasoning on account of Byron's digressions. By generalizing his argument into an attack against the whole policy of the government (which other speakers, one might just add, were not innocent of doing), Byron might be said to have become not sufficiently à propos to the immediate issue. And this is possibly where his marvellous hospital image proves fatal: for the vividness of the image obfuscates any underlying argumentative force - the image is more interesting than the point it is making; and no doubt its poetic appeal was completely lost on the Lords. While Lord Grenville also castigates the government for its light treatment of 'the life of man', both he and Lord Holland (and, indeed, the other Opposition speakers) are far more guarded and temperate (and duller) in their speeches than Byron, though not without their own particular brand of abuse.

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1. Cf. Hints from Horace, 135/142.

The Monday after his speech (Monday March 2nd, 1812), his 'Ode to the Framers of the Frame Bill' appeared in the Morning Chronicle. Its sentiments are much the same as those of his speech, though expressed in much stronger and more personal language. He attacks the government and supporters of the Frame Work Bill, 'Whose remedy only must kill ere it cures', and hopes that 'the frames of the fools may be first to be broken. /Who, when asked for a remedy, sent down a rope.' <sup>1</sup> Such an explosion into rhyme indicates that speaking in the House of Lords was no substitute for verse, which in turn seems to tie in with his sense of its theatricality and suggests that Parliament offered him no satisfactory forum for effective self-expression.

One last point on this particular topic of frame-breaking. Byron's allegiance to the frame-breakers continued into later years. Writing to Moore four years later from Italy, he exclaims 'Are you not near the Luddites? By the Lord! If there's a row, but I'll be among ye! How go on the weavers - the breakers of frames - the Lutherans of politics - the reformers?', which is followed by his 'Song for the Luddites'. <sup>2</sup> Despite its impromptu composition, the 'Song' is full of republican sentiment, and the frame-breakers are compared with the 'Liberty lads' of the French Revolution (not quite such a hyperbole as may be thought). Since the whole tone of this letter is one of hilarity and facetiousness, Byron's remarks must be taken guardedly. But his phrase 'the Lutherans of politics' is significant: for, just as the generalization in his speech shows his tendency to see the universal in the particular, the general in the specific, so here again he sees the cause of the frame-breakers as a symbol of reform. And, it is with such - the symbol of liberty and reform, the universality of the issue, that his political sympathies ultimately lie. Had there been a real 'row' it is conceivable that he would have returned: for, some action so frankly unequivocal was precisely what he was after. But this is to anticipate.

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1. PW, III, 9.

2. To Thomas Moore, December 24, 1816, LJ, V, 149.



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1. PW. III, 9.

2. To Thomas Moore, December 24, 1816, LJ. V, 149.

Twelve days after this speech, on March 10th, 1812 Childe Harold I and II, became available to the public, and Byron awoke to find himself famous. A whirlwind of Society and affairs carried him through the next eighteen months, and it is not until we get to his Journal 1813/14 that we can fully appreciate the depth of his dissatisfaction with himself and life. But, in the meantime, came his second speech.

#### Byron's Second Speech

Despite his statement that after his first speech Childe Harold came out '& nobody ever thought about my prose afterwards'<sup>1</sup> (to which we shall recur yet again later), the encouragement he received after that speech must have prompted him to 'experiment' with his second. It was delivered less than two months after his first, on April 21st, 1812, and there are no references to it either by himself in his letters before or after making it, nor by others in their speeches during the debate or in private. The only reference that seems to have been made to it is by Hobhouse who 'staid up all night at the House of Lords' and wrote in his diary that he had 'heard Byron - who kept the House in a roar of laughter - Ld. Grenville the best'.<sup>2</sup> For reasons which will, with hope, become clear, this speech will be dealt with in a different manner than his first one. Although still in opposition, this time he was speaking in favour of a Whig motion for a Committee on the Roman Catholic Claims (basically, claims for equal rights with Protestants). The petition for this motion had originally been presented in both Houses as far back as March 25th, 1805 (by Lord Grenville in the Lords; by Fox in the Commons). As we have seen, Byron, then at Harrow, seems to have attended the major debate that took place in early May of that year. It is in his summing up against the motion in that debate, that Lord Sidmouth expressed the creed typical of Tory policy:

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1. LJ. IX, 16.

2. Hobhouse diary, April 21, 1812, Marchand, I, p. 345.

There were two roads before their lordships: one of them was that old, venerable, and well known way, which had been struck out for them by their ancestors; in pursuing that they could encounter no dangers. The other was a way untrodden and dangerous, leading to innovations, the consequences of which no human foresight could reach.<sup>1</sup>

'My lords,' said Lord Grenville in his summing up on the same occasion, 'if there be danger, let us look that danger in the face.' Taken together these remarks succinctly distinguish the attitude of each party, and tell us something of the prevailing atmosphere in which Byron was to find himself; on the one hand, blind dependence upon tradition, rigid prejudice against novelty, and Authority's concern for its own preservation; on the other, flexibility and a liberal disposition to face up to problems realistically. And the former attitude belonged to the Tory stronghold.

Whether or not Byron did hear Fox's speech on May 13th, 1805, his own speech in 1812 bears several marked resemblances to it; and these seem worth dwelling upon for a moment. In his preamble, Byron admits - 'In some degree I concur with those who say, it is not the time exactly [i.e. for Catholic emancipation]; that time is past':

There was indeed a time when the Catholic clergy were conciliated, while the Union was pending, that Union which could not be carried without them, while their assistance was requisite in procuring addresses from the Catholic counties; then they were cajoled and caressed, feared and flattered, and given to understand that 'the Union would do everything'; but the moment it was passed, they were driven back with contempt into their former obscurity.<sup>2</sup>

Now compare Fox:

With regard to the time when these restrictions ought to have been removed, if there could be one time more proper than another, it was when the Union was carried. To that measure I certainly was hostile, ... [but this] is nothing to my present argument. The period at which the introduction of this measure would have been most proper, doubtless, was the moment when the expectations of the Roman Catholics were raised, when hopes were held out to them, or when they themselves at least conceived that the hour of their emancipation was arrived.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, IV (1805).
  2. This and the subsequent quotations from Byron's speech are taken from Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, XXII (1812).
  3. This and the subsequent quotations from Fox's speech are taken from Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, IV (1805).

The import of both these passages is too alike to be overlooked, though Byron's tone is far more impassioned. Again, Byron states:

But there are, who assert that the Catholics have already been too much indulged; see (cry they) what has been done, we have given them one entire college, we allow them food and raiment, the full enjoyment of the elements, and leave to fight for us so long as they have limbs and lives to offer, and yet they are never to be satisfied! Generous and just declaimers! to this, and to this only, amount the whole of your arguments, when stripped of their sophistry.

Which splenetic effusion echoes the brief, matter-of-fact statement made by Fox:

It is said, that since the Roman Catholics have already got so much, they ought not to ask for more. My principle, however, is directly the reverse.

Fox quotes from Paley; Byron quotes exactly the same passage. Fox makes oblique reference to 'the treatment of the black slaves on the coast of Africa'; Byron refers directly to them: 'It might as well be said, that the negroes did not desire to be emancipated ... I pity the Catholic peasantry for not having the good fortune to be born black.' Finally, both Fox and Byron refer to the advantage Napoleon will continue to have while the Catholics remain unemancipated. First Fox:

But it is said, Buonaparté has obtained an influence over the pope, the pope governs the Irish priests, and thus Buonaparté will be able to attach to him the catholics of Ireland. Without canvassing the inclination of the pope to serve the views of Buonaparté, I shall admit that the French government will willingly employ his influence so far as they can obtain it. That the great enemy of this country would be very willing to make use of such an engine to serve his purposes in Ireland, I have no doubt. But how will he use his influence? If you will repeal these laws, you will have nothing to fear from that quarter; but if, on the contrary, you persevere in your restrictions, the way in which the influence so much dreaded may be exercised can only be this: The Irish catholics will be told, ... 'You have ... only to look to a catholic emperor for assistance, and through him you may expect the emancipation which has been denied you.'

In this instance, Byron's comments are briefer and terser:

There is no measure more repugnant to the designs and feelings of Buonaparte than Catholic Emancipation; no line of conduct more propitious to his projects than that which has been pursued, is pursuing, and, I fear, will be pursued, towards Ireland. What is England without Ireland, and what is Ireland without the Catholics? It is on the basis of your tyranny Napoleon hopes to build his own.

Such similarities seem too great to be incidental. This is not to suggest that Byron consciously plagiarized or otherwise borrowed from Fox's speech: there are plenty of other points in it that would have appealed strongly to him, such as the proportion of Irish Catholics serving in the English army without hope of advancement. On this score, Byron makes only the most passing allusion in the above passage - the exploitation of Irish 'limbs and lives'; while elsewhere he points out that the only recent triumph abroad had been achieved by an Irishman (Wellington) and, though not a Catholic, 'had he been so, we should have been deprived of his exertions' - which is a good point. But it appears almost certain that Byron had either heard Fox speak in 1805, or else had read his speech at some time or other, and that various points re-emerged in his memory while he was composing his own. This is perhaps somewhat peripheral to the present concern. What is of more interest is that a comparison between these passages perhaps gives some indication as to the strengths and weaknesses of Byron's oratory. Notice, for example, Fox's moderation and even-temper, the complete absence of abuse and emotional emphasis: he has no sentence such as Byron's 'cajoled and caressed, feared and flattered', nor such an outburst as 'Generous and just declaimers!' Notice also how adroitly Fox turns an apparently adverse argument to his own advantage, in the passage concerning Napoleon. Byron's oratory would have profitted from attention to such details. Nevertheless, in this speech he had clearly researched his material thoroughly: each point that he elicits is supported by circumstantial evidence. Basically, his argument is for equal rights for the Catholics and for the just observance of those rights by those who grant them. It rests upon the following broad statement:

It is indeed singular, that we are called together to deliberate, not on the God we adore, for in that we are agreed; not about the King we obey, for to him we are loyal; but how far a difference in the ceremonies of worship, how far believing not too little, but too much (the worst that can be imputed to the Catholics), how far too much devotion to their God, may incapacitate our fellow-subjects from effectually serving their King.

The remainder of his speech is really an exposition of the insidious means by which the Catholics were treated as second-class citizens. He deals with their deprivations under the heads of Law, Education, the purchase of land and the practice of their religion. Such method gives an order or a framework to his argument, which is hardly conspicuous in his first speech, and suggests a very real effort on his part to make his speech better reasoned. But the Devil always rears his head; almost invariably, Byron ends what might have been considered a reasonably measured argument with a jibe or otherwise barbed remark. Concerning the Protestant schools, for instance, he uses an exceedingly strong image:

Schools do you call them? Call them rather dunghills, where the viper of intolerance deposits her young, that when their teeth are cut and their poison is mature, they may issue forth, filthy and venomous, to sting the Catholic. (emphasis added).

Such imagery is consistently used throughout his poetry for those he scorns or detests; and poetically, it is strong and effective. But, in the context of oratory and the House of Lords, it is mere verbiage and wholly misplaced. There is no argumentative force in such language; at most it is only the abuse of an angryman. A more effective image occurs when he briefly compares the Union to a 'shark' that swallows its 'prey'. This makes its point more subtly than the above bombast, because it is subsidiary to, and bears a relation to, the over-all point he is making. Generally though, imagery is out of place altogether; no other speaker appears to have depended on it, let alone a metaphor.

In his conclusion which is ironical to the point of insolence he outlines the reasons for the government's present 'popularity' in the country. He refers to the gratitude it would find were it to 'plunge into the Midland counties' (i.e. the Frame-breakers), or to 'take a trip' to Ireland where it would 'rush at once into the embraces of four Catholic millions'. The irony sustained throughout over five hundred words is clever and amusing (and bitter);

but, as with his images, its exaggerated tone serves only to lessen the argumentative effect.

On the whole, this speech despite Byron's attempt at better reasoning is more hot-blooded than his first, especially towards the close where he becomes almost recklessly vituperative. There is a profusion of literary quotations and allusions extending to Shakespeare, Swift, Johnson, Pope, Prior, Horace, Roman History, the Bible - to name only the most obvious; and he draws on such references at those points where he seeks to embarrass or ridicule the government, or make the whole issue appear as one of trivial bigotry. But in effect, they are as useless as his images and as detrimental as his irony. What this suggests however - his use of images, irony, allusions, is that oratory was a mere extension of his literary pursuits; that in his oratory he could not prevent himself from lapsing into his literary habits. Writing his speeches (and he did write them), was not sufficiently distant from writing poetry.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding its greater length (twelve columns in Cobbett's - twice the length of his first speech), this speech perhaps suffers further from Byron's having attempted to pack too much into it. He criticizes everything, but does not expatiate sufficiently nor in depth on each individual point. Fox's speech, for instance, is thirty-one columns long, and is intricately argued; each point is considered from every conceivable angle, and the argument each angle raises adverse to his own is refuted and dispensed with as he goes along. Byron tries to do this himself in places; but he drifts almost irresistibly into irony and abuse, which perfectly expresses his contempt and exasperation, but undermine or otherwise devalue the force of his polemic.

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1. This seems to be underscored by a later comment to Kinnaird: 'if I can be of any use - I will come over - but it would be as well to have something else to do than "speak and write"'. To Douglas Kinnaird, February 24, 1817, LJ. V. 172.



In a sense, this speech is worse than his first in that he plays up all the bad tendencies of 'his first speech: there is no 'modest impudence'<sup>1</sup>, but sheer arrogance and provocation. Marchand has aptly described its tenor as 'provocative and defiant'.<sup>2</sup> It is also a good deal more affected than his first speech - as if he is trying to show off, to 'shine', to prove just what a clever person he could be. It would be wrong to say that he did not care about the issue in question - he did, passionately; but his lack of restraint marred the speech. It is far too emotive, and one can imagine only too well that the House received his onslaught with amused and gracious patience - for he was famous by this time.

#### Major Cartwright's Petition

One can hardly call this a speech, for Byron merely presented the Petition with an accompanying preamble. Nonetheless, as a complete contrast to his former speeches this is interesting in several minor ways. It was presented on June 1st, 1813 - more than a year after his second speech. It petitioned the Lords for the liberty of the individual to petition for parliamentary reform - a somewhat inflammable issue. It was brave of Byron to accept the undertaking. As he truly states:

The petitioner, my lords, is a man whose long life has been spent in one unceasing struggle for the liberty of the subject, against that undue influence which has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished.<sup>3</sup>

Major Cartwright, a 'veteran Radical of the nineties' and "'the father of Reform'", had, since 1811, been 'planting a crop of Hampden Clubs for parliamentary reform among the working men of the industrial north and midlands'<sup>4</sup>. His activities were well-known to the Government which looked upon the London Hampden Club - to which Byron belonged<sup>5</sup> - as a hot-bed of sedition.<sup>6</sup>

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1. To Francis Hodgson, March 5, 1812, LJ. II, 167 (emphasis added).
  2. Marchand. I, p. 345.
  3. This and the subsequent quotations from the debate are taken from Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, XXIII (1813).
  4. Waterloo to Peterloo. R. J. White (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 132, 140, and 133.
  5. LJ. IX, 23.
  6. Waterloo to Peterloo. R.J. White (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 143.

The odds were already set against Byron. Indeed, as Marchand observes:

Just how radical that position was it is difficult now to realize unless we refer it to hysterical periods in our own more recent history when it has taken a brave man to stand up against popular fears and prejudices and speak out for the constitutional rights of free speech. Some indication of what a lone wolf Byron really was on this occasion will be seen in the fact that Cartwright could not get the Reform Whig leader Whitbread to present the petition in the lower house.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, Byron was at pains to point out the 'firm, yet respectful language' in which the Petition was couched, adding that it was 'the highest mark of respect that could be paid to the House, that to its justice, rather than by appeal to any inferior court' Cartwright had committed himself. The House chose to think otherwise; and this very point was raised by Earls Fitzwilliam and Lauderdale as an objection to receiving the Petition. Byron gives a synopsis of Cartwright's complaint and concludes:

Your lordships will, I hope, adopt some measure fully to protect and redress him, and not him alone, but the whole body of the people insulted and aggrieved in his person, by the interposition of an abuse civil, and unlawful military force between them and their right of petition to their own representatives.

Notice again how he lifts the issue from the local and specific to the general: the threat is not only to the rights of the individual but to those of 'the whole body of the people', of which that individual is but a representative. Byron had one supporter in the House, Earl Stanhope - 'Citizen Stanhope', as he was known popularly - who was, like Cartwright, one of the first champions of parliamentary reform. Needless to say, the Petition was rejected; but the reasons for its rejection do not owe themselves to any fault of Byron's. They rested upon the point mentioned above (that no inferior court had been approached in the first instance); the absence of a 'Prayer', it was rather 'the written speech of the individual who had signed it' - Lauderdale; and upon 'the censure on the conduct of a most respectable magistrate (Mr. Radcliffe), who had acted in such a manner as to deserve praise, instead of reproach' - the Duke of Norfolk (himself a subscriber to the London Hampden

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1. Marchand, I, p. 391.

Club), with which Sidmouth, coming in late to the debate, concurred. The technical reason (the 'Prayer'), and the almost formal support for the 'most respectable magistrate' (i.e. prevailing justice and authority), lessen the ignominy of Byron's defeat, indicating as they seem to do the Government's prejudiced attitude. To reject an issue on the grounds of formalities is a neat way of a weak or partial Government avoiding the necessity of discussing it. For once, brief as his comments are, Byron is without 'impudence' or defiance; he is completely low-key, factual and restrained - no 'fancy', no display of 'wit'. Indeed the 'abuse' (see post) which he received came quite gratuitously and without provocation from Lauderdale: 'This was not the fair mode of petitioning, but would have only become [sic] the noble Lord to have moved as a peer'. This spiteful remark perhaps suggests some undercurrent hostility to the Poet-Peer, besides the individual he was representing. For the first time, Byron actually answered his critics (i.e. spoke spontaneously) by asking 'What was the necessity of a prayer?' and re-iterating the 'respectful language' of the Petition. As hopeless as he obviously realized his position was, he did not lose his self-control.

As early as March 1813 - that is, not much above a year since his first speech, and three months only before his presentation of Major Cartwright's Petition, Byron was tiring of parliamentary life. He wrote to Lord Holland: 'I have neither the verve nor the "copia fandi"<sup>1</sup> to rival Lord Ellenborough in Moloch-like declamation in the House'.<sup>2</sup> And, to his sister a day later, he writes: 'my parliamentary schemes are not much to my taste - I spoke twice Session - & was told it was well enough - but I hate the thing altogether - and have no intention to "strut another hour" on that stage'.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Richness of expression or, 'copiousness of declamation', LJ. IX, 43.
  2. To Lord Holland, March 25, 1813, LJ. III, 30/31.
  3. To Augusta Leigh, March 26, 1813, LJ. III, 32.

These comments are revealing. To Lord Holland, Byron is self-critical - he lacks self-confidence, energy and ability. But in so far as he qualifies this with 'to rival Lord Ellenborough in Moloch-like declamation' his criticism is barbed. For clearly, given the terms of the rivalry (its 'Moloch-like' quality) participation was distasteful to him. This is why he 'hate/d' the thing altogether'. It was too bloody. Later he wrote to Hunt "Politics!" - the barking of the wardogs for their carrion has sickened me of them for the present.<sup>1</sup> His comment to his sister is more openly critical of parliament: it is a stage, removed from real life. For Byron this meant creating a persona, or pose, which was no more his real self than were the poses in his poetry. One is reminded again of Sheridan's 'would but grow a parliament man' (emphasis added). Parliament required not that he be himself, but that he wear a mask. As he later wrote to Douglas Kinnaird: 'You have not hypocrisy enough for a politician'.<sup>2</sup> Given his loathing of 'cant' and his desire to express himself in his own person, this stage sense of parliament is an important factor to bear in mind as a reason for his ceasing in the House. This stage vocabulary is repeated in his Journal:

I have declined presenting the Debtor's Petition, being sick of parliamentary mummeries. I have spoken thrice; but I doubt my ever becoming an orator. My first was liked; - the second and third - I don't know whether they succeeded or not. I have never yet set it con amore; - one must have some excuse to oneself for laziness, or inability, or both, and this is mine. "Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me;" - and then, I "have drunk medicines," not to make me love others, but certainly enough to hate myself.<sup>3</sup>

And again: 'Baldwin is boring me to present their King's Bench Petition. I presented Cartwright's last year; and Stanhope and I stood against the whole House, and mouthed it valiantly.'<sup>4</sup> Notice the 'mummeries' and the 'mouthed'; the one suggests the futile acting out of certain expected gestures; the

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1. To Leigh Hunt, May-June 1, 1815, LJ. IV, 295.
  2. To Douglas Kinnaird, February 3, 1817, LJ. V, 168.
  3. LJ. III, 206.
  4. LJ. III, 228/229: The Debtor's Petition and the King's Bench Petition were the same thing.

second, some sort of dumb show. The image of Parliament as a theatre is unavoidable.<sup>1</sup> But here, he also offers several other reasons: dissipation, laziness, inability but also the lack of response to his speeches, his not knowing 'whether they succeeded or not'. It was suggested that the encouragement that he received after his first speech prompted him to the swift 'experiment' of his second. The year's interval between his second speech and the presentation of Cartwright's Petition, perhaps indicates that, despite recesses of Parliament, the absence of encouragement after that second speech contributed to his diffidence. No doubt dissipation and 'laziness' did distract him from setting to oratory 'con amore', but it seems plausible to add that his interests were not engaged sufficiently because he did not know the impression he was making. He depended upon encouragement. Concerning the presentation of the Debtor's Petition, he records again in his Journal: 'Now, had [Lady Oxford] been here, she would have made me do it. There is a woman, who, amid all her fascination, always urged a man to usefulness or glory', and a few lines later:

Here I cannot stimulate myself to a speech for the sake of these unfortunates, and three words and half a smile of [Lady Oxford] had she been here to urge it (and urge it she infallibly would - at least, she always pressed me on senatorial duties, and particularly in the cause of weakness) would have made me an advocate, if not an orator.<sup>2</sup>

The point need not be laboured - he needed external stimulus.<sup>3</sup> This stimulus however, could come from another quarter. In his Detached Thoughts, Byron says that after his first speech Childe Harold was published '& nobody ever thought about my prose afterwards, nor indeed did I'.<sup>4</sup> The implication is that he did not think about it because others did not; which relates in turn to the lack of encouragement. But one person, at least, did think about

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1. Compare also: 'I shall take my seat on tuesday, & not go to the romantic melodrama of Monday notwithstanding the attraction of a royal Roscius'. To Lady Melbourne, November 26, 1812, LJ. II, 250. (Roscius, the Roman comic actor; also the sobriquet of the contemporary actor William Betty).
  2. LJ. III, 229.
  3. That it could best come from a woman - a mother/lover figure is perhaps significant, but only of tangential interest here.
  4. LJ. IX, 16.

his prose. In the Examiner (Sunday, January 28th, 1816), Leigh Hunt had praised Byron's effort in the House of Lords, but queried why he did not speak more frequently. Byron replied on the following day:

if you knew what a hopeless & lethargic den of dullness & drawling our hospital is - during a debate - & what a mass of corruption in its patients - you would wonder - not that - I very seldom speak - but that I ever attempted it - feeling - as I trust I do - independently, - However - when a proper spirit is manifested "without doors" I will endeavour not to be idle within.<sup>1</sup>

To take the latter part of this passage first: he would clearly be prompted to act were 'a proper spirit' animated amongst the people. Here, not the urging of a single woman but the sense of animation, vitality and interest in the country would stimulate him. But, as he had written to Lady Melbourne, the populace were uninterested and indifferent towards politics:

At Budgen I blundered on a Bishop - the Bishop put me in mind of ye Government - the Government of the Governed - & the governed of their indifference towards their governors which you must have remarked as to all parties - these reflections expectorated as follows ...

'Tis said Indifference marks the present time  
Then hear the reason - though 'tis told in rhyme -  
A king who can't - a Prince of Wales who don't -  
Patriots who shan't - Ministers who won't -  
What matters who are in or out of place  
The Mad - the Bad - the Useless - or the Base?<sup>2</sup>

X The almost claustrophobic sense of enervation and stultification is emphasized here by Byron's own underlining: he has stressed every word of a negative nature. Faced with such an apathetic, purposeless and shiftless political atmosphere, his own impatience and sense of futility was hardly likely to diminish. And this returns us to his letter to Hunt, and the image which he uses to characterize the House of Lords: a hospital. We have already noticed a similar use of this image in his first speech. There, the House is by implication the hospital, while the Government is the Surgeon and the people are the patients. Here however, all the members of the House are the patients;

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1. To Leigh Hunt, January 29, 1816, LJ. V. 19, and note.
  2. To Lady Melbourne, September 21, 1813, LJ. III, 117.

and every word fulsomely suggests their inertness and decrepitude, and the dead atmosphere of the whole House. Writing to Hobhouse from Italy several years later, Byron uses another image which admirably captures the same idea: hunting.

our house is not animating like the hounds of the commons - when in full cry. - 'Tis but cold hunting at best in the Lords. - - I never could command my own attention to either side of their oratory - but either went away to a ball - or to a beefsteak at Bellamy's - and as there is no answering without listening - nor listening without patience - I doubt whether I should ever make a debater.<sup>1</sup>

The sporting image - so apposite, considering Byron's predilection for physical activity - perfectly conveys the lethargy of the one House (in the same way as the hospital image does) and the energy and excitement of the other. The lack of animation and stimulation refers us to a point discussed earlier concerning the "craving void";<sup>2</sup> in the light of these later remarks, Parliament merely served to increase this feeling. 'I like energy - even animal energy - of all kinds; and I have need of both mental and corporeal.'<sup>3</sup> quite clearly, Parliament offered him neither. One final point. In his Detached Thoughts (1821), he records:

The impression of Parliament upon me - was that its members are not formidable as Speakers - but very much so as an audience ... Whatever diffidence or nervousness I felt - (& I felt both in a great degree) arose from the number rather than the quality of the assemblage, and the thought rather of the public without than the persons within - knowing (as all know) that Cicero himself - and probably the Messiah could never have alter'd the vote of a single Lord of the Bedchamber or Bishop. - - I thought our house dull - but the other animating enough upon great days. - -<sup>4</sup>

This re-inforces many of the points already made; but his extension of the audience to the 'public without' adds an interesting dimension to the remarks concerning the public he makes in his letters to Hunt and Lady Melbourne above.<sup>5</sup> This suggests his awareness both of the very public nature of his Parliamentary role, and the possibility that he might be more persuasive and influential

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1. To John Cam Hobhouse, October 17, 1820, LJ. VII, 205.
  2. LJ. III, 109.
  3. Journal entry, 1813; LJ. III, 216/217.
  4. LJ. IX, 16/17.
  5. To Leigh Hunt, January 29, 1816, LJ. V. 19; To Lady Melbourne, September 21, 1813, LJ. III, 117.

outside the House. That is, there seems to be an indication that he had hoped to gain adherents outside the House, and so become the leader of a faction or lobby, or even the mouthpiece for the people, and thereby become a truly representative and forceful figure. His Journal entry may be construed in this way: 'If I had any views in this country, they would probably be parliamentary. But I have no ambition; at least, if any, it would be "aut Caesar aut nihil".'<sup>1</sup>

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1. LJ. III, 217.



## CHAPTER 3

### NAPOLÉON AS HERO

There is one subject on which Lord Byron is fond of writing, on which I wish he would not write - Buonaparte. Not that I quarrel with his writing for him, or against him, but with his writing both for him and against him. What right has he to do this? Buonaparte's character, be it what else it may, does not change every hour according to his Lordship's varying humour. He is not a pipe for Fortune's finger, or for his Lordship's Muse, to play what stop she pleases on. Why should Lord Byron now laud him to the skies in the hour of his success, and then peevishly wreak his disappointment on the God of his idolatry? The man he writes of does not rise or fall with circumstances: but 'looks on tempests and is never shaken'.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most important contemporary figure in Byron's universe is Napoleon. From his youth, when he had defended his bust of Napoleon 'against the rascally time-servers'<sup>2</sup> at Harrow, Byron had idolized him. On his first trip to the East, he witnessed the scars left by Napoleon in Portugal and Spain, and recorded his impressions in Canto I of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. From 1812 onwards, his Letters and Journals are full of references, comments and anecdotes concerning Napoleon and his fortunes. In 1814, Byron writes his Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte and thereafter Napoleon, besides being the subject of several minor poems, figures conspicuously in Childe Harold III and IV, The Age of Bronze, and the later Cantos of Don Juan. He criticizes him, sympathizes with him and identifies with him. He writes 'both for him and against him' - as Hazlitt complains; but he does so because he understands Napoleon's character rather more astutely than does Hazlitt.

Indeed, Hazlitt's accusation against Byron of duplicity - though incorrect - illustrates the ease with which Byron's treatment of Napoleon may be misinterpreted. Hazlitt himself was a vast admirer of Napoleon which,

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1. The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, edited by P. P. Howe, 21 Vols. (London and Toronto: Dent, 1930), V, pp. 153/154.

2. LJ. III, 210.

perhaps feeling that criticism bespoke disloyalty, possibly jaundiced his understanding of Byron's attitude towards him. That attitude is ambivalent, and in places deliberately ambiguous; for Byron is simultaneously attracted and repelled by Napoleon. Attracted by his astounding display of single-handed power and energy; repelled by his egoism, tyranny and blood-thirstiness. Yet he remains loyal to him. He rarely attacks him without sympathy, and he rarely praises him without some qualification.

But there is another reason for Byron's apparent 'duplicity'. In a note to Don Juan, I, stanza 2, he defends himself against Hazlitt's accusation in a manner that indicates his objective critical acuity of Napoleon's character:

I have considered his [Napoleon's] character at different periods, in its strength and in its weakness ... I tell Mr. Hazlitt that I never flattered Napoleon on the throne, nor maligned him since his fall. I wrote what I think are the incredible antitheses of his character.<sup>1</sup>

It is this, Byron's poetic appraisal of Napoleon's antithetical nature, that Hazlitt misconstrues. To a certain degree, Byron's ambivalent attitude reflects the ambivalence of his subject: because Napoleon's character itself is equivocal, Byron's treatment of him is likewise equivocal; though this is not to deny Byron's personal duality towards Napoleon.

In this chapter then, we shall pursue Byron's considerations of Napoleon in an attempt to form a more precise assessment of his attitude(s) towards him, and to expose those qualities (admirable or otherwise) he regarded him as exemplifying.

Byron's first poetical treatment of Napoleon occurs in the stanzas on Portugal and Spain in Childe Harold I. He appeals to the Portuguese to resist 'the wrath of Gaul's unsparing lord'<sup>2</sup>, and later in Spain alludes to

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1. Poetry. VI, 12/13.

2. CHP 1, 16.

Napoleon as 'the Giant'<sup>1</sup>, 'the Scourger of the world'<sup>2</sup> and 'Gaul's Vulture, with his wings unfurl'd'.<sup>3</sup> Such images suggest a being possessed of super-human power, whose nature is both tyrannical and predatory. By referring metaphorically rather than by name to Napoleon, Byron effectively raises his stature to that of a mythological character: the idea of an angry, avenging Old Testament god, or even Milton's Satan, does not seem far from his mind.

Lo! where the Giant on the mountain stands,  
His blood-red tresses deep'ning in the sun,  
With death-shot glowing in his fiery hands,  
And eye that scorseth all it glares upon;  
Restless it rolls, now fix'd, and now anon  
Flashing afar, - and at his iron feet  
Destruction cowers to mark what deeds are done;  
For on this morn three potent nations meet,  
To shed before his shrine the blood he deems most sweet.<sup>4</sup>

Byron's reverence and revulsion are evident here. The titanic dimensions of Napoleon are simultaneously stressed and deprecated by the successive images of blood, death and relentless violence; while the eye/fire image and density of verbs serve to underline the energy and power at his command. Lines 5/6 are particularly forceful in this connection: the inversion of the basic metre into trochees in the opening words 'Restless' and 'Flashing', the return to the iambic in 'now fix'd' and the subsequent enjambment, and the tight alliteration overall, capture and emphasize the motion and control of the dominant 'eye'. Even the sun, which contrasts naturally with the eye through the light/heat imagery of 'glowing', 'fiery', 'scorseth' and 'glares', is less potent than it - which thus preserves the cosmic proportions of 'the Giant'. We are presented then, with a creature who is the very embodiment of will and energy, and whose stature, eye and 'iron feet' suggest tenacity or obduracy of purpose.

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1. CHP 1, 39.
  2. CHP 1, 52.
  3. CHP 1, 52.
  4. CHP 1, 39.

Yet in lines 6/9, we are faced with an ambiguity: 'Destruction cowers' at Napoleon's feet. The 'cowers' seems to indicate that Napoleon is the master of 'Destruction'. But the 'his' in the final line complicates the issue: to whom does this 'his' refer? Given that the whole focus of the stanza has been on the warlike nature of 'the Giant', it is tempting to ascribe 'his shrine' and 'the blood he deems most sweet' to him rather than 'Destruction', which would thus maintain the stature Napoleon had initially been given. Yet Byron quite explicitly says 'three potent nations meet' - that is, England, Spain and France - to offer their sacrifice of blood at the 'shrine'. If 'his shrine' then, refers to 'Destruction', all the participants, including Napoleon, are reduced to mere instruments of 'Destruction'; thus qualifying Napoleon's omnipotence. A later stanza supports this view:

Three hosts combine to offer sacrifice;  
Three tongues prefer strange orisons on high;  
Three gaudy standards flout the pale blue skies;  
The shouts are France, Spain, Albion, Victory!  
The foe, the victim, and the fond ally ...  
Are met ...  
To feed the crow on Talavera's plain,  
And fertilize the field that each pretends to gain.<sup>1</sup>

The use of anaphora in the first three lines lends itself to the idea of an incantation and strengthens the sacrificial image. But it also emphasizes the 'Three'; so that none, not even Napoleon, is exempted from the sacrifice, but all are equally subject to 'Destruction'. The ultimate bathos - that the sacrifice in effect merely provides food for the 'crow' and fertilization for the earth (an image to which Byron is particularly partial in connection with war), dispossesses war of any glory and reduces the standing of those involved in it:

Enough of Battle's minions! let them play  
Their game of lives, and barter breath for fame;  
Fame that will scarce reanimate their clay,  
Though thousands fall to deck some single name.<sup>2</sup>

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1. CHP 1, 41
  2. CHP 1, 44.

Such an ironically euphemistic metaphor as 'game' for war diminishes the participants, the war itself, and also the nature of 'fame'. The words 'play', 'game', 'name', 'fame' unite through rhyme or association ('play' the 'game') to emphasize the triviality of war and ambition: 'fame' is merely a 'name' won through playing a 'game'. Yet this triviality assumes grotesque proportions when juxtaposed to the criminal expenditure of human life necessary to satisfy the ambition and establish the fame of a single man. The 'game' then, is trivial in its aims, but dire in its consequences. Furthermore, the phrase 'Battle's minions', while reiterating that all participants are mere instruments in the hands of 'Destruction', also suggests that those who seek fame through war lose their freedom, by becoming slaves to the necessary means which the fame they covet demands. Byron makes these views abundantly clear in a letter to E. N. Long (May 1st, 1807).

I am truly sorry the duties of your profession call you to combat, for what? Can you tell me? The ambition of Despotism or the caprice of men placed by chance in the Situation of Governors, & probably inferior to yourself & many more ... I am not insensible to Glory, & even hope before I am at Rest, to see some service in a military Capacity, yet I cannot conquer my repugnance to a Life absolutely & exclusively devoted to Carnage, or bestow any appellation in my Idea applicable to a mercenary Soldier, but the Slave of Blood.<sup>1</sup>

The loss of freedom is twofold here: not only is a soldier regarded as a mere instrument in the service of others - a pawn in the 'ambition of Despotism', but his profession leads him to become possessed by an appetite for slaughter, 'the Slave of Blood' (the phrase suggests that 'Carnage' creates its own appetite). The submission then is both to men and to the exigencies of war: to the one he surrenders his independence, to the other his self-mastery, and Byron wishes to preserve both. Yet even here Byron's attitude to war is ambivalent: for, 'some service in a military Capacity' is the path to 'Glory'. This same ambivalence is central to his attitude to Napoleon. It is Napoleon's particular occupation which disgusts Byron: he condemns his

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1. LJ. I, 118/119.

involvement in war, his thirst for war, and the excesses that pertain to war. But he admires Napoleon's energy, will and command even in war - the mastery he shows in his otherwise obnoxious profession.

In his Journal for 1813/14, Byron records (November 17th 1813):

What strange tidings from that Anakim of anarchy - Buonaparte! Ever since I defended my bust of him at Harrow against the rascally time-servers, when the war broke out in 1803, he has been a 'Heros de Roman' of mine - on the continent; I don't want him here. But I don't like those same flights - leaving of armies, etc. etc. I am sure when I fought for his bust at school, I did not think he would run away from himself. But I should not wonder if he banged them yet. To be beat by men would be something; but by three stupid, legitimate-old-dynasty boobies of regular-bred sovereigns - O-hone-a-rie! <sup>1</sup>

Again the ambivalent attitude is clearly suggested at the outset here in the phrase 'Anakim of anarchy'. Again we find him referred to as a 'Giant' - this time as a biblical giant - who is undermining the 'legitimate' European hegemony by disseminating disorder on the continent. Yet he is the master of that confusion he has himself created. On the one hand he is anarchic for upsetting the traditional order and authority of the 'legitimate-old-dynasty boobies of regular-bred sovereigns' - a favourable point in Byron's view; on the other hand he is the protagonist of that anarchic state into which he has precipitated Europe. While Byron obviously delights in the prospect of the overthrow of the European Powers and of a real man coming to power, he also censures the war - the 'anarchy' - that Napoleon is perpetrating indispensable as it may be to such a transition of power. But since war is necessary, Byron can still acknowledge Napoleon as an 'Anakim' of it while discrediting the very nature and condition of his status as 'Anakim'.

But a fresh aspect to Byron's ambivalent attitude arises from this passage in the phrases "'Heros de Roman'" and 'on the continent; I don't want him here'. "'Heros de Roman'" suggests that Napoleon's appeal to Byron is fictive or unreal: he belongs to a novel not to the real world. In the

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1. LJ. III, 210.

same way 'on the continent; I don't want him here' preserves the distance between Napoleon's reality and his attraction to Byron's imagination. Byron does not want him to step out of the novel of which he is the hero; nor does he want him to descend from the stage, which is the continent, into the auditorium, which is England, and in which Byron is a contented spectator. So long as Napoleon remains in the unreal, dramatic world, myth and ideal can cling to him while Byron's imagination plays around him: his reality would fracture Byron's conception of him. (It is perhaps significant that, though Byron possessed a bust of Napoleon and a portrait, he never attempted to see him in real life). Hence Napoleon embodies the two opposites to reality that exist in Byron's mind: the unreal and the Ideal. The unreal is the somewhat incredible, stagey, "Heros de Roman" Napoleon, whose exploits Byron may follow from a distance. The Ideal is the extemporal, representative and symbolic Napoleon with whom Byron feels a vital imaginative connection. The difference here between the unreal and the Ideal cannot be too greatly stressed, as it underlies Byron's whole attitude not only to Napoleon, but to Literature and Life<sup>1</sup>. The unreal may be taken quite simply as the mental or imaginative alternative to real life; the Ideal is, so to speak, the actual or hoped for realization of the unreal. As interconnected as these two seem to be, in Byron's mind they are quite distinct. The unreal is something which he is capable of looking at without pretending that it is anything other than unreal - that is, he knows that he is being imaginatively engrossed by it. With the Ideal, he actually sets up that unreality as an aim towards which to strive.

#### Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte

Byron's first poem to deal exclusively with Napoleon is the Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte, the first draft of which was written on April 10th 1814 after Napoleon's abdication. At first it consisted of ten, and then twelve stanzas; rose to fifteen, and then to sixteen stanzas, and eventually to the

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1. See for example GHP IV, 5-7.

nineteen stanzas we have today.<sup>1</sup> Concerning the final stanzas (17-19), Byron wrote to John Murray: 'I don't like the additional stanzas at all - and they had better be left out'.<sup>2</sup> According to the best of editorial principles, McGann has followed Byron's directive - though this breaks with the traditional publication of the poem, and has placed these stanzas after the Ode, calling them 'Additional Stanzas'. In so doing, he has offered the following judgement as to their poetical value:

As poetry, the three stanzas are more than acceptable; but as a new conclusion to the Ode, they injure the poem's accomplished pace. B's decision to exclude them was a good one.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, when considering the Ode, we shall take into account the aesthetic question and test the validity of McGann's statement.

Byron's first reaction to Napoleon's abdication is recorded with ceremony and passion in his Journal for 1813/14:

Saturday, April 9th. 1814

I mark this day!

Napoleon Buonaparte has abdicated the throne of the world. 'Excellent well.' Methinks Sylla did better; for he revenged and resigned in the height of his sway, red with the slaughter of his foes - the finest instance of glorious contempt of the rascals upon record. Dioclesian did well too - Amurath not amiss, had he become aught except a dervise - Charles the Fifth but so so - but Napoleon, worst of all. What! wait till they were in his capital, and then talk of his readiness to give up what is already gone!! 'What whining monk art thou - what holy cheat?' 'Sdeath! - Dionysius at Corinth was yet a king to this. The 'Isle of Elba' to retire to! - Well - if it had been Caprea, I should have marvelled less. 'I see men's minds are but a parcel of their fortunes.' I am utterly bewildered and confounded.

I don't know - but I think I, even I (an insect compared with this creature), have set my life on casts not a millionth part of this man's. But, after all, a crown may be not worth dying for. Yet to outlive Lodi for this!!! Oh that Juvenal or Johnson could rise from the dead: 'Expende - quot libras in duce summo invenies?' I knew they were light in the balance of mortality; but I thought their living dust weighed more carats. Alas! this imperial diamond hath a flaw in it, and is now hardly fit to stick in a glazier's pencil; - the pen of the historian won't rate it worth a ducat.

Psha! 'something too much of this.' But I won't give him up even now; though all his admirers have, 'like the Thanes, fallen from him.'<sup>4</sup>

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1. For the full publishing history, see McGann, PW. III, 456/7.
  2. LJ. IV, 107.
  3. PW. III, 456.
  4. LJ. III, 256/7



This contains in embryonic terms the substance of the poem he was to write the following day. But it tells us much better than does the Ode, the event's personal impact upon Byron. For the Ode is not written in the tone of one who is 'utterly bewildered and confounded', as this passage clearly is. The profusion of exclamation marks, references and quotations, and the fragmented almost impressionistic way in which his thoughts pour out, suggest a mind that is so overpowered with intensity of feeling that it is unable to express itself coherently.

The first paragraph compares Napoleon's fate with that of his dictatorial predecessors; Sylla, Charles V of Spain and Dionysius figuring respectively in stanzas 7, 8 and 14 of the Ode. The point behind the comparison with these, and Diocletian and Amurath as well, is that they resigned their position without compulsion when they were at the very height of their power: Napoleon surrendered his when he had already lost it. Byron also scorns Napoleon's retirement to the Isle of Elba<sup>1</sup> as indicating the meanness of his mind. ('"I see men's minds are but a parcel of their fortunes"'). Had it been Caprea, which is where Tiberius retired to, it would have been more appropriate and possibly more dignified (because of the Tiberius association)<sup>2</sup> The second paragraph contains a mixture of sentiments and ideas. Despite events, Byron, in all humility still considers his own life's aims and achievements of 'insect' value compared with those of Napoleon, which points forward to the loyalty expressed in the final paragraph. The next sentence queries the very worth of that glory to which Napoleon aspired, which the remainder of the paragraph develops. Implicit here is Byron's wish that Napoleon had died rather than 'outlive' his glory in disgrace. The question he asks himself is whether it is worthwhile venturing one's life in the pursuit of power; whether it is not rather, as Juvenal and Johnson would have him

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1. cf. stanza 14 of the Ode.
  2. The scene of choice delectations. Byron later contemplated writing a drama on the subject, 'softening the details, and exhibiting the despair which must have led to those very vicious pleasures.' (LJ.VIII, 37)
  3. cf. stanza 11 of the Ode.

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believe, as futile and as vain as all human ambition. The Latin quotation (which also features as the first epigraph to the Ode) comes from Juvenal's Satire X, which Johnson 'imitates' in his poem The Vanity of Human Wishes. Quite clearly Byron is thinking of these two poems specifically here. But, as he goes on to say in the following sentence, he had always understood that the greatest leaders had an equal, if not less, chance of survival in matters concerning life and death; but that, with regard to their actual lives, he had supposed them to be of greater intrinsic value than those of the rest of humanity. The fall of Napoleon has shown him the justice of Juvenal's and Johnson's pessimistic observations.<sup>1</sup> This helps us to interpret the final sentence of the paragraph. For the 'imperial diamond' is not, as might easily and understandably be thought, a metaphor or metonymy for kingship or power, but is a metaphor for Napoleon himself. Napoleon is not the whole man Byron had taken him for, but is 'flawed' with human weaknesses. The image is another example of Byron's double attitude, in so far as it combines his disillusion and admiration: despite his 'flaw', Napoleon is nonetheless an 'imperial diamond'. And despite Byron's disappointment with him, he 'won't give him up even now'.

Before moving on to discuss the Ode itself, it is worth briefly considering the second of Byron's epigraphs to the poem which is taken from Gibbon's Decline and Fall.

The Emperor Nepos was acknowledged by the Senate, by the Italians, and by the Provincials of Gaul; his moral virtues, and military talents, were loudly celebrated; and those who derived any private benefit from his government, announced in prophetic strains the restoration of public felicity. . . .

By this shameful abdication, he protracted his life a few years, in a very ambiguous state, between an Emperor and an Exile, till-----<sup>2</sup>.

Obviously Byron is drawing a parallel here between Napoleon and the Emperor Nepos (who had the misfortune of being assassinated - which makes

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1. cf. stanza 12 of the Ode.
  2. PW, III, 259.

Byron's uncompleted sentence darkly ominous). What this comparison does is to stress the contrast between Napoleon's career and the manner in which it ended. In the first part, Byron projects Napoleon as a man of 'moral virtues' and 'military talents', who had the potential for realizing the 'restoration of public felicity'. This is high praise indeed. But in the second part, he exposes Napoleon's irredeemable disgrace: his 'shameful abdication', and his choosing to live out the remainder of his life 'in a very ambiguous state, between an Emperor and an Exile'. This contrast is exploited in the Ode. But it is essentially the manner of Napoleon's abdication and his choice of life at the cost of honour, that Byron finds so ignoble and humiliating and for which he castigates him in the poem.

The Ode is neither Pindaric nor Horatian in form. Byron seems to be following the less formal and more personalized style deriving from the 18th century, which was favoured by his fellow Romantics.<sup>1</sup> At all events, Byron seems to have constructed his own form: nine lines rhyming ababccbdd, consisting of a quatrain of alternate tetrameters and trimeters, followed by a couplet in tetrameters, then a trimeter, while the whole is rounded off with a couplet in tetrameters.<sup>2</sup> What is interesting about this form is that the quatrain can set forth an idea, which the following three lines can expand, develop or offer a contrast to, while the final couplet can give an epigrammatic conclusion to the whole. This is extraordinarily sonnet-like: but, more relevant, is the striking way in which Byron works towards the final clinching couplet,<sup>3</sup> which the stringencies of the Spenserian stanza adopted in Childe Harold tended to inhibit. The Ode's structure is both tight and dynamic, allowing a fluidity of thought and expression within a certain formal rigidity.

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1. In this respect, it might profitably be compared with some of the more familiar Romantic odes: Keats' Odes, for instance, Shelley's West Wind, Wordsworth's Intimations, or Coleridge's Dejection.
  2. The nearest this comes to seems to be Gray's Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College.
  3. A promise of the use of the stanzaic form of Don Juan.

'Tis done - but yesterday a King!  
And arm'd with Kings to strive -  
And now thou art a nameless thing  
So abject- yet alive!  
Is this the man of thousand thrones,  
Who strew'd our Earth with hostile bones,  
And can he thus survive?  
Since he, miscall'd the Morning Star,  
Nor man nor fiend hath fall'n so far.

I

We are here presented with most of the devices Byron is to employ throughout the poem - irony, bathos, juxtaposition, hyperbole - in order to emphasize the contrast between the former state of Napoleon and his present ignominy. The abrupt opening reflects the finality of his career, while the remaining lines of the quatrain juxtapose the role he had as 'King' against the 'nameless thing' he has now become. This capitalizes on the 'ambiguous state' mentioned in the second epigraph. Napoleon is both 'nameless' and a 'thing' because his questionable status does not bear definition - it has no name. The reduction from 'King' to a 'nameless thing' preserves the bathos of Napoleon's fall, which the hyperbole in line 5 of 'thousand thrones' continues. This 'thousand', which might otherwise appear an idle exaggeration, effectively conveys the idea of numberless 'thrones' and hence suggests the unlimited power Napoleon once possessed. (Obviously 'thousand thrones' is alliterative and appeals to Byron's poetic taste. But compare the more moderate and realistic use of 'thirteen' or 'thirty'. Either of these would maintain the scansion and alliteration; but by being too specific, both would fail to create the sense of unbounded power.) Byron's incredulity at Napoleon's survival comes across forcefully in the exclamation (line 5) and rhetorical question (line 7). There is both wonder and contempt here. Byron is not merely astonished at his surviving the catastrophe but at his being able to survive it 'thus' - that is, in his degraded condition. The implication, which is made explicit in stanza 11, is that Napoleon should not be able to bear his life with such dishonour and should make an honourable end of himself.

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As can be seen, there is a mixture of direct apostrophe to Napoleon ('thou') and reference to him in the third person ('Is this the man ...', and 'can he thus ...'). This is characteristic of the first ten stanzas (though thereafter, and including the 'Additional Stanzas', the personal address prevails), and contributes to Byron's dual attitude. It suggests a tension, which Byron is either unable or refuses to resolve, between his feeling of intimacy and sympathy with Napoleon, and the degree of objectivity or detachment with which he is attempting to treat him. This duality is continued in the punning reference to the 'Morning Star', which relates Napoleon to Lucifer both as the 'fiend' (Satan) who fell, and as the 'Light bringer' (the 'enlightener'). In this latter capacity, Napoleon had seemed to Byron the harbinger or inaugurator of a new era. That this was indeed Byron's expectation is supported by an entry in his Journal for 1813/14:

After all - even the highest game of crowns and sceptres, what is it? Vide Napoleon's last twelvemonth. It has completely upset my system of fatalism. I thought, if crushed, he would have fallen, when 'fractus illabitur orbis,' and not have been pared away to gradual insignificance; - that all this was not a mere jeu of the gods, but a prelude to greater changes and mightier events. But men never advance beyond a certain point; - and here we are, retrograding to the dull, stupid old system, - balance of Europe - poisoning straws upon king's noses, instead of wringing them off! <sup>1</sup>

This optimistic anticipation of Napoleon's significance, 'a prelude to greater changes and mightier events', might suitably be compared also with a stanza from Don Juan addressed to Wellington.<sup>2</sup>

Never had mortal man such opportunity,  
Except Napoleon, or abused it more.  
You might have freed fallen Europe from the unity  
Of tyrants and been blessed from shore to shore.

'Except Napoleon'; he too had had the opportunity of freeing Europe from the 'unity of tyrants', but he 'abused it'. And hence, like Lucifer, he was 'miscall'd the Morning Star'. This is picked up and expanded in the second stanza of the Ode.

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1. LJ. III, 218.

2. Don Juan. IX, 9.

Ill-minded man! why scourge thy kind  
Who bow'd so low the knee?  
By gazing on thyself grown blind,  
Thou taught'st the rest to see,  
With might unquestion'd - power to save -  
Thine only gift hath been the grave  
To those that worshipp'd thee;  
Nor till thy fall could mortals guess  
Ambition's less than littleness!

The precise nature of Napoleon's abuse of power is clarified here. From having had the 'power to save' Europe from the tyranny of the 'Holy Alliance' - the 'dull, stupid old system'<sup>1</sup> of 'regular-bred sovereigns',<sup>2</sup> he became instead like a 'regular-bred sovereign' himself. Instead of saving men from the clutches of oppression, he had merely sent them to their 'grave[4]', both literally and figuratively speaking. Literally, because he had sacrificed his soldiers in battles undertaken to further his own selfish pursuit of personal glory: figuratively, in so far as he had disappointed ('killed', so to speak) the hopes of those who, like Byron, had put such faith in him. Again the religious imagery ('bow'd so low the knee', 'might unquestion'd', 'power to save', 'worshipp'd'), emphasizes the god-like position Napoleon had held and the capacity of Saviour he failed to exploit.<sup>3</sup>

The seemingly cryptic lines 3/4 comprise the core of the stanza's argument. Blinded by his own brilliance (his success), Napoleon lost sight of his destiny as liberator and became obsessed with power and the accumulation of power for its own sake (and his own) alone. That is, he surrendered his will and self-mastery to the temptations of egoism and to the thing power<sup>4</sup>. In a recently published essay, 'Byron and Napoleon in Polish Romantic Myth', Stefan Treugutt expresses the issue cogently:

1. LJ. III, 218.
2. LJ. III, 210.
3. One might suitably compare Johnson's treatment of Wolsey in The Vanity of Human Wishes, 99/108, where Wolsey's stature is delineated in similarly god-like imagery. Indeed, the whole passage concerning Wolsey, 99/120, is comparable to what Byron is saying throughout his Ode.
4. cf. 'Slave of Blood' LJ. I, 119. See also stanza 8 'lust of sway' (italics added), and CHP III, 38 'lust of war' (italics added). Had Byron written 'for' in either of these cases, he would have significantly altered the implication. As it stands, 'of' suggests that 'lust' inheres in 'sway' or 'war'. So, in this present stanza, Byron suggests that Napoleon was overpowered by the thing power.

Napoleon did not accomplish his mission. [His] genius had been tempted by egoism, which made him replace the sword of Europe's liberator and creator of a new order with the imperial crown of dynastic ambitions.<sup>1</sup>

This admirably captures the point Byron is making in these lines. And in yielding to the temptations of egoism and power, Napoleon thus teaches man the worthlessness of ambition. The third stanza develops this theme:

Thanks for that lesson - it will teach  
To after-warriors more  
Than high Philosophy can preach,  
And vainly preached before,  
That spell upon the minds of men  
Breaks never to unite again,  
That led them to adore  
Those Pagod things of sabre-sway,  
With fronts of brass, and feet of clay.

Bearing in mind the last two lines of stanza 2, the quatrain in this stanza indicates that the lesson provided by Napoleon is more palpable than the preachings of Philosophy because he is an example from actual living experience: real life, rather than abstract moralizing, (the suggestion being, of course, that 'Philosophy' - argument, the Word - is less forceful than facts and deeds. Hence, 'vainly preached before' (italics added)). The 'spell' that is broken 'never to unite again' (the finality is finely emphasized by the placing of 'Break' at the beginning of the line after the enjambment), suggests two things. Firstly, that men will never again allow themselves to be deluded into thinking that a man can be god on earth,<sup>2</sup> and hence will never again hero-worship one of their own kind. Secondly, that men will not succumb to the alluring magic of ambition: the desire for glory, power, fame, success. Napoleon's example has exposed ambition as, in Rochester's words, 'an ignis fatuus in the mind'.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Lord Byron and His Contemporaries: Essays from the Sixth International Byron Seminar. Edited by Charles E. Robinson. (Newark, and East Brunswick, New Jersey: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses. 1982, p. 140.
  2. 'But men never advance beyond a certain point', LJ. III, 218.
  3. A Satire against Mankind, 12. Cf. also The Vanity of Human Wishes, 7/12: Johnson's phraseology is very similar to Rochester's, just as Byron's point here is essentially similar to both of theirs: ambition is a dangerous, delusive influence, mesmerizing man's reason and judgement.



The final two lines (alluding, as McGann points out, to Daniel 2, 31/45<sup>1</sup> - which passage is particularly appropriate to Byron's overall theme in this stanza), draw to a powerful climax the religious imagery established in the second stanza and continued in this ('preach', 'adore'). 'Pagod' is extremely suggestive. It means 'idol', deriving from the Portuguese Pagode (a temple for idols), or from the Indo-Chinese Pagoda (any sacred building). But in English, a 'Pagoda' is an imitation of either of these. The indication is, then, that by 'Pagod' Byron means a false idol. In the light of the reference to Daniel (particularly verse 42, 'And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken'), the word does indeed beg such interpretation. Napoleon was a false idol: he presented a 'strong' front of brass, beneath which were in fact only 'broken' feet of clay. The image serves to increase the tension between his former god-like appearance and his mere human stature in reality, as revealed to Byron by his fall. For the first time here Byron is regarding Napoleon realistically: he has taken his 'Heros de Roman' out of the novel and is ruthlessly stripping him of his 'unreal' nature. Indeed, the highly freighted and concrete phraseology of this image - the anomalous object 'things', the 'sabre-away', the 'fronts of brass' and 'feet of clay' (despite the initial biblical allusion of the latter two) - can be seen as depriving Napoleon of any superhuman qualities by levelling him to the world of men. Nonetheless, the idea of a fallen (as opposed to a false) god still clings to him. The tension is continued in the next stanza:

The triumph, and the vanity,  
The rapture of the strife -  
The earthquake voice of Victory  
To thee the breath of life;  
The sword, the sceptre, and that sway  
Which man seem'd made but to obey,  
Wherewith renown was rife -  
All quell'd! - Dark Spirit! what must be  
The madness of thy memory.

4.

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1. PW. III, 457.

As can perhaps be seen from the stanzas so far cited, what is beginning to emerge in the poem is a sequence of thought or argument whereby each stanza follows on consecutively from its predecessor - developing, justifying or qualifying, issues, themes or ideas expressed in the stanza before. This formal coherence lends to the unity of the poem as a whole and contributes to the force of its polemic.

However, the structure of this stanza differs somewhat from that of the foregoing three - and to good effect. The enumeration of Napoleon's worldly preoccupations, extending over the first seven lines, is abruptly arrested by the bathos: 'All quell'd!' at the opening of the eighth line. Thus the whole weight of the stanza is borne more noticeably by the final couplet. The generous accumulation in the earlier lines, which aggrandizes Napoleon, stimulates our anticipation and expectation: the lines build upon one another. So that when we reach the dismissive two words in the eighth line, the climax is all the more successfully bathetic both for its delay and its economy. This is as effective in proclaiming the finality of Napoleon's career as is the 'Tis done' in the opening stanza of the *Ode*. The word 'quell'd' itself is admirably appropriate: for it reduces, contains, constrains the expansiveness of the preceding lines. And this makes way for the final line: the idea of 'memory' being an everpresent threat of 'madness' to a man. The idea, that is, of man being imprisoned by his past.<sup>1</sup> What is worth noting here is Byron's imaginative understanding of Napoleon's mental predicament and the covert sympathy the line conveys.

The sympathy is perhaps extended in the apostrophe 'Dark Spirit!' This is an attempted refinement of the 'nameless thing' of stanza 1, and the anomalous 'things' of stanza 3. In effect, however, it defines neither, and

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1. This is a theme to which we shall become accustomed in Byron's poetry, particularly after 1816; and those poems dealing with such mental-imprisonment - where memory prevents action and living in the present - will be the subject of the next chapter.

remains ambiguous. 'Spirit' suggests a god-like being - an energy, a power, a force; but 'Dark' suggests either its unfathomable nature or its evil (mis-directed, misguided) nature in the manner of Lucifer, which again refers us to 'the Morning Star' of the first stanza<sup>1</sup>. The ambiguity is played upon in the fifth stanza, where Byron launches with gusto into paradox and irony:

The Desolator desolate;  
The Victor overthrown!  
The Arbiter of other's fate  
A Suppliant for his own!  
Is it some yet imperial hope  
That with such change can calmly cope?  
Or dread of death alone?  
To die a prince - or live a slave -  
Thy choice is most ignobly brave!

5.

As in the first stanza, we find again here the mixture of third-person and direct address to Napoleon. In the quatrain, the third-person reference aided by the liberal use of exclamation marks, carries the ironic tone of the juxtapositions to the point of contempt for Napoleon. The questioning and the return to the personal address in the subsequent lines, however, tend to relieve the stanza of that initial contempt. Indeed the sixth line betrays Byron's admiration for the fortitude with which Napoleon faced his fall (fortitude which the sustained alliteration in the line seems to mirror). The rhetorical questions, vainly seeking the explanation for such composure, underline the enigmatic character of Napoleon already suggested by 'Dark Spirit!' in the previous stanza. Either Napoleon is upheld by a secret determination to regain his former power (a prophetic supposition in the event), or else he can 'calmly cope' with his fall and its consequences because nothing in life can affect or disturb him: the only fear he has is of death. In both cases he maintains his superiority over other men.

Again the paradox in the final line belies Byron's sympathy for Napoleon. Had he chosen to 'die a prince', Napoleon would have been truly

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1. And to stanzas 9 and 16, see post.

'brave'<sup>1</sup> and not ignoble.<sup>2</sup> Yet even his choosing to 'live a slave' is, nonetheless, 'ignobly brave' (italics added) - for reasons which become clearer in the next stanza (6).

The next three stanzas introduce various historical figures with whose fate Napoleon's own is compared. The first is Milo (an athlete from Crotona, Italy, eaten by wolves when his hands were trapped in a tree he was trying to split):

He who of old would rend the oak,  
Dreamed not of the rebound;  
Chained by the trunk he vainly broke -  
Alone - how looked he round?  
Thou in the sternness of thy strength  
An equal deed hast done at length,  
And darker fate hast found:  
He fell, the forest-prowlers' prey;  
But thou must eat thy heart away!

6.

Napoleon's 'darker fate' explains why his 'choice' in stanza 5 was 'ignobly brave'. Milo died in his attempt to 'rend the oak'; Napoleon will have to live with his defeat. And, as Byron sees it, to live with the sense of failure is a slow, tormenting death, 'But thou must eat thy heart away!'<sup>3</sup> In this respect Napoleon is 'brave'.

In his note to this stanza, McGann very reasonably states that Byron 'chooses this peculiar allusion in order to make a reference (via the 'Oak's' [sic] rebound) to England's defeat of Napoleon'<sup>4</sup>. Now while this may very well be so in a local sense, there is, it seems, a rather larger issue at stake here. In his Journal for 1813/14, on April 8th - the day before he had confirmation of Napoleon's abdication - Byron recorded:

1. Early MS readings: 'Thou mightst have died a Prince - tis brave', PW. III, p. 261.
2. Cf. stanza 11.
3. Cf. stanza 4 'The madness of thy memory!'
4. PW. III, p. 457.

Out of town six days. On my return, found my poor little pagod,  
Napoleon, pushed off his pedestal; - the thieves are in Paris.  
It is his own fault. Like Milo, he would rend the oak; but it  
closed again, wedged his hands, and now the beasts - lion, bear,  
down to the dirtiest jackall - may all tear him. That Muscovite  
winter wedged his arms....<sup>1</sup>

What Byron is suggesting, then, by his allusion to Milo is that Napoleon, like Milo, pressed his advantage too far. Since the 'Muscovite winter wedged his arms', Napoleon should have been more cautious thereafter and curtailed his ambition: but hubris led him on to overstep the mark. And this is what Byron means by his phrase 'would rend the oak': hubris, the tragic flaw of classical heroes. So, while the allusion does indeed embrace 'England's defeat of Napoleon', it has rather more universal application - and again implicitly equates Napoleon's stature to that of his classic predecessors. Hence the irony in the third line: the very spirit which led Napoleon to glory, is the same as that which causes his downfall: he is 'Chained' by what he 'broke'.<sup>2</sup> The word 'vainly' suggests both the futility of the struggle for glory, and the egoism and failure of that struggle. It captures perfectly Byron's criticism of both the aspiration and the position aspired for. The next two stanzas attempt to justify this position.

The Roman, when his burning heart  
Was slaked with blood of Rome,  
Threw down the dagger - dared depart,  
In savage grandeur, home, -  
He dared depart in utter scorn  
Of men that such a yoke had borne,  
Yet left him such a doom!  
His only glory was that hour  
Of self-upheld abandon'd power.

7.

The Spaniard, when the lust of sway  
Had lost its quickening spell,  
Cast crowns for rosaries away,  
An empire for a cell;  
A strict accountant of his beads,  
A subtle disputant on creeds,  
His dotage trifled well;  
Yet better had he neither known  
A bigot's shrine, nor despot's throne.

8.

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1. LJ. III, 256.
  2. Cf. CHP III, 36 post.

These stanzas refer respectively to Sylla and Charles V of Spain, both of whom we have already encountered in Byron's Journal entry for April 9th 1814.<sup>1</sup> Yet, though each performed a similar action - that of abandoning their power when they were at the height of it, Byron does not allude to them for the same reason.

The principal interest concerning the allusion to Sylla, is that Byron does not equate 'power' with 'glory'. Indeed, quite the reverse. Sylla's 'power' was not itself estimable: a tyranny, upheld by the 'dagger' and steeped in the 'blood of Rome'. His 'glory', however, lay in his daring to abandon that 'power' while he was still in possession of it (the re-iterated 'dared depart' draws attention to the courage and extraordinariness of this act). That is, 'power' had not obsessed Sylla to the point where he grew, as Napoleon did, 'blind',<sup>2</sup> and unlike Napoleon his act proved his self-mastery. Sylla's ability to divest himself of the thing 'power', bore witness to his inherent quality of power - and therein lay his 'glory'. Moreover, the hallmark of this 'glory' is the attitude with which he abandoned 'power': 'utter scorn'.<sup>3</sup> This 'scorn' or 'contempt' seems to be directed not only at those who had endured his 'power' ('borne' his 'yoke'), but also at that very 'power' he had wielded: if people are contemptible enough to bear his 'yoke', then 'power' over such people is itself contemptible. Sylla recognized this, Napoleon did not.<sup>4</sup>

The allusion to Charles V, however, provides a subtle contrast to Sylla's example. The imagery of stanza 7, particularly in the quatrain, is rich in action and vitality: 'burning heart', 'slaked with blood', 'Threw down',

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1. LJ. III, 256.

2. Cf. stanza 2.

3. Cf. 'glorious contempt' of the Journal entry, LJ. III, 256.

4. A point only covertly implied here, but expanded with greater care in CHP III, 40. See post.

'dared depart', 'savage'. This captures the energy and power still at Sylla's command when he abandoned his position (picked up in the final line by 'self-upheld'), and emphasizes that his act was of his own volition and choice. The imagery of stanza 8, on the other hand, particularly the first two lines, indicates that Charles was already exhausted by, and had become bored with, 'power' by the time he abandoned it: the 'lust of sway' (italics added) had 'lost its quickening spell' (italics added).<sup>1</sup> In contrast to Sylla, Charles' act was not so much one of willed choice, but lack of interest: 'power' had lost its appeal, and he was tired of it. Byron condemns this, which explains why his Journal entry reads 'Charles the Fifth but so so' (italics added).<sup>2</sup> And the remainder of the stanza testifies to this condemnation. The ironic juxtapositions of lines 3 and 4 ('crowns'/'rosaries', 'empire'/'cell'), and the bathos and pathos of the next three lines ('strict accountant of his beads', 'subtle disputant on creeds', 'dotage' and 'trifled'), all infer the pedantic meanness of Charles' mind in exchanging his 'empire' for a 'cell', and Byron's contempt therefore. Hence the derision of the final line: 'bigot's' and 'despot's' finely balancing the poetry of the line and suggesting the interaction of the two.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, despite the bathos of this stanza (vis-a-vis its predecessor), the next stanza, in which we return to Napoleon, is even more bathetic. Thus the structural sequence of these stanzas (7, 8, 9), makes Napoleon's act appear all the more obnoxious. It is also interesting to note that this sequence follows Byron's thinking in his Journal entry for April 9th 1814: first Sylla, then Charles, 'but Napoleon, worst of all'.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Cf. also 'spell', stanza 3.
  2. LJ. III, 256.
  3. Byron shows the subtlety of his poetic ear here: 'bigot's'/'despot's'. The earlier MS reading for the latter is 'tyrant's': PW. III, 263.
  4. LJ. III, 256.

But thou - from thy reluctant hand  
The thunderbolt is wrung -  
Too late thou leav'st the high command  
To which thy weakness clung;  
All Evil Spirit as thou art,  
It is enough to grieve the heart,  
To see thine own unstrung;  
To think that God's fair world hath been  
The footstool of a thing so mean;

9.

Once again the quatrain here finds its counterpart in Byron's Journal entry for April 9th, 1814: 'What! wait till they were in his capital, and then talk of his readiness to give up what is already gone!:'<sup>1</sup> Not only was Napoleon, unlike Sylla and Charles, forced to abdicate ('reluctant' and 'is wrung' suggesting that he did so with little grace), but he did so when he had no further counters to play with ('Too late'; this also implies that he was too late to earn that 'glory' Sylla could claim by abandoning power while still in full command of it). Napoleon's 'weakness' in line 4 was that he had become obsessed with power, and had not self-mastery enough to divest himself of it; that is, he had 'grown blind'<sup>2</sup> in the terms previously discussed. The address 'All Evil Spirit' refers us to the 'Morning Star' of the first stanza, and to the 'Dark Spirit' of stanza 4. There thus seems to be a development in the poem from Napoleon as the ambiguous satanic and enlightener figure (stanza I), the satanic and unfathomable figure (stanza 4), to Napoleon as wholly and unambiguously satanic in this present stanza. His satanism is emphasized in the final couplet: the world is God's 'footstool'.<sup>3</sup> Napoleon had abused his power and usurped 'God's fair world'. Nonetheless, the world 'hath been' Napoleon's 'footstool'; he has, the implication seems to be, for a period been a god on earth and has only latterly shown his true 'Pagod' status<sup>4</sup>. So that Byron manages to praise and deprecate Napoleon at one and the same time. Notice the reference to Napoleon as a 'thing' again:

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1. LJ. III, 256.

2. Stanza 2.

3. McGann justly directs our attention to Isaiah, 66, 1: PW. III, 457.

4. Stanza 3.



Byron is avoiding any formal definition of Napoleon's present status for reasons we have already considered. But here, as with 'Pagod things'<sup>1</sup>, there seems to be an added note of contempt suggested by the context. But again, Byron's sympathy bursts out irresistibly in lines 6 and 7. As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, Byron rarely attacks Napoleon without sympathy, and these two lines provide as good an instance as any to pause to consider why. From a poetic point of view, they show that Byron had that imaginative empathy which most of the major Romantics professed to share. This is best summed up by Keats: 'if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence [sic] and pick about the Gravel'<sup>2</sup>. Byron describes his experience in a letter to Moore:

My ideas of a character may run away with me: like all imaginative men, I, of course, embody myself with the character while I draw it, but not a moment after the pen is from off the paper.<sup>3</sup>

Although this was written in 1822, its point holds good for the present stanza and Byron's poetic operation. Byron here imaginatively puts himself in Napoleon's position and feels what he imagines Napoleon must feel<sup>4</sup>. He thus penetrates Napoleon's psychology with a deeper understanding that brings Napoleon before us as a living, rather than a mere text-book, historical figure. From another, more personal point of view however, Byron's sympathy is indicative of his innate humanity which makes him incapable of unmerciful criticism. A man may be an 'Evil Spirit' but he is nonetheless a man whose heart can be 'unstrung' - who can feel and suffer ordinary human emotion. Byron's position here is similar to Lear's sudden flash of sympathetic understanding for 'unaccommodated man': Napoleon is someone to be pitied.

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1. Stanza 3.

2. Letters of John Keats. A new selection edited by Robert Gittings (Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 38. To Benjamin Bailey, 22nd November 1817; See also p. 157, to Richard Woodhouse, 27th October 1818, the poet has no 'identity', which compares strikingly with Shelley's idea of the 'chameleon' poet.

3. LJ. IX, 118/119.

4. He does this to an even greater extent in the other poems connected with Napoleon's fall: 'Napoleon's Farewell', 'From the French', and 'Ode from the French'. See post.

This stanza (stanza 9) and the following stanza, are the only two in the whole of the Ode that run on into one another, and it is perhaps significant that after his direct and finally sympathetic address to Napoleon in stanza 9, Byron should refer to him in the third person in stanza 10 - as if to create some detachment from him.

And Earth has spilt her blood for him,  
Who thus can hoard his own!  
And Monarchs bowed the trembling limb,  
And thanked him for a throne;  
Fair Freedom! we may hold thee dear,  
When thus thy mightiest foes their fear  
In humblest guise have shown,  
Oh! ne'er may tyrant leave behind  
A brighter name to lure mankind! 10.

As can be seen, the quatrain here follows on naturally from the preceding stanza, developing with increased irony the theme of the final couplet. But the irony is directed not so much at Napoleon as at those kings who have been in his thrall. Since Napoleon has proved himself 'a thing so mean', all 'Monarchs' who were subject to him are seen as figures of even greater derision. For, having displayed their fear of Napoleon (in the guise of inferiority or humility), they have in fact demonstrated how tenuous they feel their own positions to be. And since men now realise that 'Monarchs' are afraid and cling to their power in the knowledge of its vulnerability, the survival of 'Freedom' (from tyranny) is ensured. In effect, then, Napoleon has undermined the security and authority of kingship altogether. Hence the remorseless irony of the final couplet - which reiterates, in ironical terms, the point raised in stanzas 2 and 3: man will not be lured by any such tyrant's name but will be confirmed in his pursuit of liberty. This is taken up and expanded in the next stanza:

Thine evil deeds are writ in gore,  
Nor written thus in vain-  
Thy triumphs tell of fame no more,  
Or deepen every stain -  
If thou hadst died as honour dies,  
Some new Napoleon might arise,  
To shame the world again -  
But who would soar the solar height,  
To set in such a starless night? 11.

The quatrain continues the satanic nature of Napoleon resolved upon in stanza 9. Here we find though that all his former achievements have, through his ignoble abdication, been transformed into their darker aspects: his deeds are 'evil' and their bloodiness emphasized ('gore'), and his 'triumphs' and 'fame' merely contribute to the degradation of those deeds. This is an extremely cruel stanza and we might be inclined to agree with Hazlitt's criticism noted earlier at this point. Yet Byron does actually capture the typical reappraisal any fallen hero undergoes: all former glories suddenly being turned into crimes, so that psychologically he is imitating and expressing the highly fickle and despicable side of human nature and loyalty (or disloyalty). That he seems to share this weakness here is, besides being reprehensible, perhaps a sign that he wrote the Ode too soon after Napoleon's fall for his thoughts to mature. His later considerations which we will come to, do not yield to such banal temptations. Just because a man suffers a reversal of fortune, it does not mean that his former deeds should be re-interpreted in an evil light - and Byron knows this. All the same it is interesting to see the various moods through which this poem is passing: the mingling of sympathy with vituperation<sup>1</sup> disappointment with sarcasm or the sardonic.

To proceed: if, however, Napoleon had 'died as honour dies', his fame and stature would have remained a monument to tempt another such aspirant to Napoleonic heights.<sup>2</sup> What Byron is suggesting here is that since Napoleon was not killed on the battlefield, nor made a noble Sylla-like exit from power, he should have taken his own life (in the manner of Brutus or Antony, not Gloucester). By doing so he would not have shown his inability to 'endure' (Gloucester), but would have shown his self-mastery and integrity, dying according to as he had lived (Brutus, Antony). His death in either manner

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1. Stanzas 4 and 9.

2. This links up with stanzas 2 and 3 and the final couplet of stanza 10.

(on the battlefield or suicide) would have proved the strength of his commitment, thus leaving the path fertile for such another - 'To shame the world again'. These last words are highly suggestive. The 'shame' is both Wilson Knight's 'shame man with his own littleness, whilst giving future generations something to look up to, and aim at'<sup>1</sup>, but it is also 'shame the world' for having produced such a monster. The final couplet, however, disposes of any such possibility. Again we see Byron using the image of the rising and setting of a star as a metaphor for the career of the ambitious<sup>2</sup>, but here he emphasizes brilliantly the loneliness of that position through the image of the final couplet: its starkness, to which perhaps the increased alliterative sibilants contributes, conveys its isolation and futility (friendlessness and vacuity)<sup>3</sup>. Stanza 12 generalizes away from Napoleon, although obviously the example of Napoleon instigates it.

Weigh'd in the balance, hero dust  
Is vile as vulgar clay;  
Thy scales, Mortality! are just  
To all that pass away;  
But yet methought the living great  
Some higher sparks should animate,  
To dazzle and dismay;  
Nor deem'd Contempt could thus make mirth  
Of these, the Conquerors of the earth.

As was observed earlier, this stanza relates to the second paragraph of Byron's Journal entry for April 9th, 1814.<sup>4</sup> The whole is a poetic rendering of the line "Expende - quot libras in duce summo invenies?" I knew they were light in the balance of mortality; but I thought their living dust weighed more carats.' The quatrain takes up the first two parts of this sentence, echoing the quotation from Juvenal<sup>5</sup>, and acknowledging that death makes no

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1. Lord Byron: Christian Virtues. G. Wilson Knight, (London, 1952), p. 239.
  2. Stanza 1.
  3. Cf. CHP III, 41 and 45.
  4. LJ, III, 256/257.
  5. Which is also the first epigraph to the Ode.

distinction between the hero and the common man: Death is the great Leveller. In a skillful play upon the word 'vulgar', Byron manages to combine its latinate usage ('vulgus', the populace, the rabble, the mass) with its more modern pejorative sense of indecent or coarse, the latter sense being stressed by its alliterative association with the word 'vile'. Thus Byron's contempt for both the hero and mankind generally is cogently expressed.<sup>1</sup>

The tercet develops the last part of the above sentence: the 'living great' matching 'their living dust', and 'higher sparks should animate' matching 'weighed more carats'. The difference in emphasis between the quatrain (which is concerned with death) and the tercet (concerned with life), can be felt through a comparison of the sonority of their words and their distinctive imagery. The quatrain's 'dust' and 'clay' and its loading of 'weigh'd', 'vile' and 'vulgar', freight the lines with a dark, dulled and heavy sense of death. The tercet, however, is packed with vividness and vitality: 'living great', 'higher sparks', 'animate', 'dazzle and dismay'. The imagery here is both of lightness and of brightness, which leads to a curious paradox. Byron is dealing in terms of weight in this stanza: 'Weigh'd', 'balance', 'scales'. Yet the 'living great' are (or were) considered to be the 'weightier', so to speak, in so far as they are paradoxically the 'lighter'. By 'lighter' is meant more spiritual, more god-like. The word 'sparks' here, and its associates, is an important and ubiquitous word in Byron's vocabulary.<sup>2</sup> It consistently suggests spirit or mind or, put another way, what is Promethean

1. An alternative reading in an earlier proof for 'vulgar clay' is 'common clay' (PW, lll, 263), which does not carry the same subtleties of suggestion as the present accepted reading. Furthermore, by spacing the alliteration, 'vile ... vulgar', Byron gives more individual emphasis to the two words: 'common clay' retains the tone of contempt, but has not the same emphatic ring: it sounds too trite, too easy.
2. Cf. "sparks of that celestial fire", LJ, III, 225; "Promethean spark", Manfred, I, 1, 154; "fiery dust", DJ, II, 212; "fiery particle", DJ, XI, 60.

or 'half-deity' in man. The 'living great', Byron had supposed, should have been endowed with some god-like attributes that remove them far above their fellow men (the 'common people', 'vulgus' - the idea here contrasts directly with line 2), in order to 'dazzle and dismay' them. These two words are highly suggestive. The word 'dazzle' (another Sun or star image) evokes what Wilson Knight has said of line 7 of the previous stanza, while 'dismay' suggests the same as 'dazzle', though in a more negative light, with the addition of fear 'shame' and also the 'dismay' of mankind for not being able to reach such comparable heights. Such overloaded words reflect the equivocal impression the 'living great' can make on their fellow men, and also the multifarious and unresolved tensions in Byron's mind regarding his attitude to such 'great' men.

The personification of 'Contempt' in the final couplet seems to relate itself to another of Byron's Journal entries already alluded to<sup>1</sup>: 'that all this was not a mere jeu of the gods'. The implication here is that the 'gods' are indeed contemptuous of earthly 'Conquerors'<sup>2</sup>; in the face of an overruling and hostile Fate, all mankind is impotent, including its 'living great'.

The next stanza breaks away from such metaphysical speculations, returning to Napoleon himself - or rather, his second wife:

And she, proud Austria's mournful flower,  
Thy still imperial bride;  
How bears her breast the torturing hour?  
Still clings she to thy side?  
Must she too bend, must she too share  
Thy late repentance, long despair,  
Thou throneless Homicide?  
If still she loves thee, hoard that gem,  
'Tis worth thy vanished diadem!

13.

1. LJ. III, 218.

2. Which thus upsets Byron's 'system of fatalism' [ibid].

This does indeed seem a cruel and unnecessary thrust at Napoleon's private life, yet it serves to illustrate several important and related points. Firstly, how Napoleon's public career has polluted even the most personal and intimate side of his domestic existence by alienating those closest to him. Doubt is cast on the continued support, loyalty and affection of Marie-Louise by the repeated questions throughout the stanza and by the 'If' at the opening of the eighth line. The effect of this is to emphasize even further Napoleon's present isolation. Moreover, by juxtaposing the private and public aspects of life (love with power and ambition), Byron effectively reveals what he considers to be of real and enduring value. The couplet bears the weight of this point: human relationship (the 'gem') is a more precious commodity than mastery of the world, or the attempted mastery of the world<sup>1</sup>, ('Homicide' and 'vanished diadem' suggest, respectively, the necessarily bloody means to power and the temporary and insecure nature of that power once obtained). The word 'Homicide' reinforces the criticism Byron has already raised in lines 6/7 of stanza 2, 'Thine only gift hath been the grave/ To those that worshipp'd thee', while expanding it to embrace the wholesale murder Napoleon's desire for power has entailed. It is also worth noting the delicate terms in which Byron refers to Marie-Louise: 'flower', 'bride', 'breast', 'clings'. The femininity of the image that arises here is not only apt with respect to Marie-Louise, but it seems to capture the fragility and vulnerability of the precious love and human affection which Byron is extolling. It also suggests that Napoleon has brought ruin upon even an innocent victim, and thus underscores the evil nature of his ambition. That Napoleon has indeed forfeited the comfort of human society is confirmed in the final three stanzas.

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1. Cf. The Island. II, 318/319.  
"Had Caesar known but Cleopatra's kiss,  
Rome had been free, the world had not been his".  
See also, DJ, VI, 4.

Then haste thee to thy sullen Isle,  
And gaze upon the sea;  
That element may meet thy smile,  
It ne'er was ruled by thee!  
Or trace with thine all idle hand  
In loitering mood upon the sand  
That Earth is now as free!  
That Corinth's pedagogue hath now  
Transferred his bye word to thy brow.

14.

An earlier MS reading for 'sullen' is 'lonely'<sup>1</sup>. This 'lonely' would merely have re-iterated Napoleon's isolation, whereas 'sullen' retains the sense of that isolation whilst also being both atmospherically and emotionally evocative. It suggests the gloom of the island and the gloom of Napoleon's mood. Moreover, it contributes to the image of Napoleon's inactivity and empty existence conveyed in 'gaze upon the sea', 'all idle hand' and 'loitering mood'. Time and idleness, Byron imagines, will weigh heavily on Napoleon. This of course contrasts sharply with Napoleon's former active existence and emphasizes the futility and powerlessness of his present state. Yet even here the extent of his former power is qualified: the sea 'may meet thy smile,/It ne'er was ruled by thee.' Again the received reading of line 4 is significantly altered from its earlier MS reading: 'For Albion kept it free'.<sup>2</sup> By changing this to the present reading, Byron firstly eliminates any allusion to England here and throughout the Ode which, secondly, thus avoids the introduction of a peripheral argument and instead universalizes the issue: no man, neither Napoleon nor England nor anyone else, has ever ruled the sea. The significance of the change can more readily be seen when we arrive at the tercet where Byron develops the image of the sea into a symbol of freedom: now that Napoleon (tyranny) has fallen, the 'Earth is ... as free' as the sea is and always will be. The sea is Byron's consistent image for eternity and freedom (the two are significantly allied in his mind), and the alteration discussed here thus restores to it its abstract quality and promises the impotence of temporal

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1. PW. III, 263.

2. PW. III, 263.



tyranny in the face of eternal freedom: that is, tyrants will never quench the spirit of liberty.

The scorn with which Byron regarded Napoleon's choice of Elba to 'retire' to, has already been noted in connection with his Journal entry for April 9th, 1814<sup>1</sup>. There is also irresistible irony in the exchange of a kingdom for a mere island, which accords with the tone of the Ode as a whole. The reference to 'Corinth's pedagogue' however, which also finds its place in that Journal entry<sup>2</sup>, is developed here in a more suggestive manner. The 'bye word' which Dionysius has transferred to Napoleon's 'brow' is of course 'tyrant'. But unmistakeably here, is the suggestion of the mark of Cain. This very effectively underlines Napoleon's position as the archetypal tyrant (and murderer and exile), but it also draws attention to Cain's discontent and individualism, his refusal to conform, his seeking after knowledge, his aspiration - in a word, his Faust-like nature.<sup>3</sup> The ambivalence of Cain's mark is inherent in the biblical story; for, not only did it distinguish him from other men - making him an outcast from their society, but it also protected him from becoming himself a victim of the very crime he had instigated. That is, despite his crime - or even, on account of his crime, his mark preserves him from death, and at the same time curses him to a life of guilt and remorse (where, in fact, death as it would have been for would be a blessing: / the Wandering Jew). Byron seems to be playing with the same duality here: Napoleon replaces Dionysius as the archetypal criminal/tyrant, and is condemned to live. The point is related, though without the covert sympathy there expressed, to the ideas that arose in connection with stanzas 4 and 6 - the 'madness' of 'memory', being imprisoned by one's past and having to live on nonetheless. This, and the theme of isolation, are continued into the penultimate stanza:

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1. LJ. III, 256/257.

2. Ibid.

3. The presence of Cain is, either directly or indirectly, ubiquitous in Byron's output, and it is not impertinent to mention here that Byron was to tackle the 'problem' of Cain more directly and with sympathy in his own drama Cain, 1821.

Thou Timour! in his captive's cage  
What thoughts will there be thine,  
While brooding in thy prisoned rage?  
But one - 'The world was mine';  
Unless, like he of Babylon,  
All sense is with thy sceptre gone,  
Life will not long confine  
That spirit poured so widely forth -  
So long obeyed - so little worth!

15.

This re-iterates much that has already been treated of throughout the poem, particularly in stanzas 4 and 6 and the final couplet of stanza 9, and the repetition adds little to the development of the Ode except perhaps to introduce two new allusions. These may plausibly be seen as enriching or extending the historical backdrop of antecedents into whose ranks Napoleon is now regarded as having entered. Moreover, in his first allusion, Byron has given a subtle twist to the story of 'Timour'. It was the despot Timur-Leng (Tamerlane or Tamberlane) who paraded the Sultan Bajazet around in a cage, goading him and taunting him until, unable to bear it any longer, he smashed his brains out against the bars. What Byron has done is to put 'Timour' into his own cage. Thus Napoleon is both Timur and Bajazet, the torturer and the tortured, the victim of his own tyranny. And the torture is explicitly mental: 'thoughts', 'brooding', and the clever pun on 'prisoned rage' (i.e. bottled-up or internal, as well as contained and literally 'prisoned'). While Byron is repeating himself here, it does show his almost obsessive interest in the psychological repercussions he feels Napoleon must be suffering: 'The madness of thy memory' again <sup>1</sup>. And this interest, particularly in actual 'madness', is continued in his allusion to Nebuchadnezzar ('he of Babylon'). McGann helpfully refers us to Daniel, 4,5 <sup>2</sup>. What Byron is suggesting here is that if Napoleon has not suffered the fate of Nebuchadnezzar and lost his sanity,

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1. Stanza 4.

2. PW. III, 458; but see also, 4.33, where Nebuchadnezzar is 'driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, etc.'. This seems even more pertinent, capturing as it does both his exile from the company of men as well as his insanity.

memory and remorse will kill him: his 'spirit' will pine away in prison for want of outlet. There is a subtle implication in these lines, 7/8: the central image that arises from the stanza is of a prison ('captive's cage', 'prisoned', 'confine'). The suggestion in lines 7/8 is that 'Life' will not long be able to 'confine' Napoleon's 'spirit' (especially where it has formerly 'poured' itself so widely forth' [*italics added*], which offers a splendid contrast - the freedom of the 'spirit' against the prison image); that is, Napoleon's 'spirit' is uncontainable; 'Life' cannot reduce it, imprison it, 'confine' it. This amounts to admiration for Napoleon's infinite striving, and prepares us for the introduction of Prometheus in the next and final stanza.

Nonetheless, despite what has been said, this stanza offers nothing that is radically new in theme or idea, and thus seems weak and laboured in comparison with others. The forced emphasis in "'The world was mine'" is a case in point, and the phrase contributes little to what has been established thematically already. Furthermore, the reference to Nebuchadnezzar is not altogether satisfactory; for, 'at the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me'<sup>1</sup>. Byron does not exploit, nor does he even seem to suggest such an illumination and return to sanity in the case of Napoleon. But, what can be said for the stanza is that it condenses and draws together themes scattered throughout the poem - principally those of mental anguish and lunacy. To these issues, the final stanza presents a contrast:

Or like the thief of fire from heaven,  
Wilt thou withstand the shock?  
And share with him, the unforgiven,  
His vulture and his rock!  
Foredoomed by God - by man accurst,  
And that last act, though not thy worst,  
The very Fiend's arch mock;  
He in his fall preserv'd his pride,  
And if a mortal, had as proudly died!

16.

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1. Daniel, 4: 34, *italics added*.

Here, on the contrary, Byron poses the question as to whether Napoleon will, like Prometheus, live on and endure his fall without remorse and with defiance. The 'vulture' may be seen as the continual reminder to Napoleon of what he once was - and hence, the constant threat of madness and regret which will assail him; while the 'rock' can be seen as, literally, the Isle of Elba (the site of his punishment and exile in real life), and also as the figurative location from whence such remorse and anguish would emanate: the mind. This allusion to Prometheus is highly suggestive: Prometheus is perhaps Byron's most favoured mythical hero. He is the friend of man, the enlightener of men who shares both human and divine qualities, and yet defies the gods both by his unorthodox act of stealing the fire from heaven and by his refusal to repent. To place Napoleon on a level with him is indeed the choicest praise Byron can offer Napoleon, however oblique or questioning that relation may be. Perhaps no stanza that we have considered so far presents better Byron's ambivalent attitude to Napoleon. Is Napoleon his god (Prometheus)? Is he the Devil (the 'Fiend')? Or is he a mere 'mortal'? Byron does not decide - though he suggests that Napoleon is less than any of these three because he did not preserve his 'pride'. (The allusion to the 'last act' is spurious and unworthy of Byron who should have verified his facts. It is founded upon 'a false and malicious story that Napoleon had a casual affair just before he left for Elba.'<sup>1</sup>) The fact that the Ode, as now received, ends here with the nature of Napoleon still indeterminate and unresolved, as if the question 'what is this creature?' remains unanswered, accords well with the tenor of the poem as a whole and returns us to, and underscores, the 'nameless thing' in the first stanza, while Prometheus and the 'Fiend' relate to the ambiguous 'Morning Star' of the same stanza. Structurally speaking, then, these sixteen stanzas form a sort of circular unity - beginning and ending at the same point. In between we have seen the development and expansion of ideas and themes, the accumulation of allusions, and eventually the condensation of these themes in

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1. PW. III, 458.

the final three stanzas which serves to give focal impact to the end of the poem. The Ode thus seems to be propelled to its conclusion by its own intrinsic force; and that energy appears to owe itself largely to the elusive nature Byron perceives in Napoleon. Byron suggests, he does not define (partly because he cannot); had he defined Napoleon, he would have categorized him, limited him and the poem would have become a matter of description and lost its exploratory, questing (and hence energetic) character.

If we turn now to the 'Additional Stanzas', we shall see whether 'B's decision to exclude them was a good one'.<sup>1</sup>

There was a day - there was an hour,  
While earth was Gaul's - Gaul thine -  
When that immeasurable power  
Unsated to resign  
Had been an act of purer fame  
Than gathers round Marengo's name  
And gilded thy decline,  
Through the long twilight of all time,  
Despite some passing clouds of crime.

1 (17)

But thou forsooth must be a king,  
And don the purple vest, -  
As if that foolish robe could wring  
Remembrance from thy breast,  
Where is that faded garment? where  
The gewgaws thou wert fond to wear,  
The star - the string - the crest?  
Vain froward child of empire! say,  
Are all thy playthings snatch'd away?

2 (18)

Where may the wearied eye repose  
When gazing on the Great;  
Where neither guilty glory glows,  
Nor despicable state?  
Yes - one - the first - the last - the best -  
The Cincinnatus of the West,  
Whom envy dared not hate,  
Bequeath'd the name of Washington,  
To make men blush there was but one!

3 (19)

In the first stanza here, the meteorological imagery is put to good effect and is consistent with that of the rising and waning of the star/sun which proliferates within the body of the Ode ('gathers', 'gilded', 'twilight', 'passing clouds'). However, the structure of the stanza is clumsy; the

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1. PW. III, 456.

extreme inversion in lines 3/4 and the curious punctuation (or lack of it) throughout, obfuscate the point Byron is making (which point is related to that raised in stanza 7 - Sylla's resignation at the height of his power). Byron is saying that Napoleon had a similar opportunity 'to resign' 'that immeasurable power' while he was still 'Unsated' by it. This would have been really glorious ('purer fame' parallels Sylla's 'only glory' in stanza 7), a greater action than even his greatest victory ('Marengo'), outweighing any of his misdeeds ('passing clouds of crime') and ensuring his lasting fame both during his life-time ('gilded thy decline', not to be confused here with his fall), and after his death ('Through the long twilight of all time'). But, as the second stanza here brilliantly shows, Napoleon did not avail himself of such opportunity because he was intoxicated with power (and thus not master of himself). The clothing imagery masterfully conveys the obsession Byron regards Napoleon as having had with the attributes and appurtenances of power - its appearances, which recalls the 'borrowed clothings' imagery of Macbeth (very aptly too). This suggests that Napoleon was more concerned with his being seen to be a 'king' than with his actual conduct as a 'king' which, in turn, suggests that the origin of his fall lay in his thus becoming king and joining the ranks of the orthodox - the 'legitimate-old-dynasty boobies of regular-bred sovereigns'<sup>1</sup>. The idea that Napoleon was playing at being a king and disregarded what true kingship entailed, is developed even more forcefully in the final couplet: he had behaved as a child who dresses up and pretends to be whatever he has dressed up as ('froward child', 'playthings', 'snatch'd'). The implication of the stanza is subtle; for it implies that without the 'gewgaws', the 'playthings', the 'purple vest' Napoleon is nothing. Or, more specifically, that he is as immature and ignorant as a perverse child. (Notice the 'child of empire' [*italics added*], not Emperor: a product of empire, not in command of empire but playing with it in ignorance).

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1. LJ. III, 210.

Both these stanzas relate logically to each other in so far as the second counteracts the idea raised in the first. Since they both concentrate on Napoleon and expand themes with which the Ode is involved, they could conceivably have been incorporated into the body of the poem without damaging it either structurally or in content. For instance, they could have been inserted immediately after stanza 7, which would shift the focus admirably from Sylla to Napoleon and thus render even more strenuous the points stanzas 7 and 1(17) deal with. Admittedly this would interrupt the compact accumulation of references that characterizes stanzas 6/8, but the sequence there does not seem vital to the integrity of the poem. Moreover, the introduction of stanza 1(17) at this juncture would add to the irony and bathos of Napoleon's career; for it would emphasize that Napoleon could have been, and so nearly was, like Sylla: that is, that the partition between 'glory' ('purer fame'), and ambition's ignobility is thin. (This is not intended as idle speculation, but to consider whether the Ode as a uniform whole would be hurt by these intrusions). However, in the case of the final 'Additional Stanza', 3(19), 'a new conclusion to the Ode' is indeed offered, which not only injures 'its accomplished pace' but digresses from the subject of the poem, and its tone and attitude. The sudden optimism, and the positive note struck, accord ill with the weight of the preceding stanzas; and Byron's turning to Washington (though sincere) seems artificial and contrived. The questions, unlike those posed in the body of the poem, he here answers with unbecoming forthrightness and definiteness. Moreover, the Ode has been an elegiac complaint, focussing on Napoleon and relating him to various mythological and historical antecedents. This stanza shifts the focus to the abstract idea of 'innocent' power (blameless, as opposed to 'guilty glory'); even Washington is only introduced as an example of this abstraction. Certainly this stanza is the least successful of any; but curiously enough its highly Johnsonian tone ('Where may the wearied eye repose'), gives it a certain validity. For Johnson too ends his

The Vanity of Human Wishes on an arguably implausible note of optimism. Considering the various allusions to Johnson and this particular poem of his,<sup>1</sup> Byron may, consciously or unconsciously, have rounded off his Ode along Johnson's lines. But, 'I don't like the additional stanzas at all'; certainly the omission of the final 'additional stanza' leaves the Ode purely with the stamp of Byron.

There are four lines of verse which McGann suggests are 'a pendant to stanza 16 of the Ode', which deserve some brief commentary here. They are dated by Murray '25th Apr. 1814' - that is to say, the same day that Byron sent him the 'Additional Stanzas' to the Ode. They have hitherto remained uncollected, and McGann himself has supplied the title, 'Prometheus and Napoleon'.<sup>2</sup>


Unlike the offence, though like would be the fate,  
His to give life, but thine to desolate;  
He stole from Heaven the flame, for which he fell,  
While thine was stolen from thy native Hell.<sup>3</sup>

These lines are not cited for any poetic merit they may or may not possess, but rather to enlarge upon those remarks made concerning stanza 16 of the Ode and the parallel Byron there draws between Prometheus and Napoleon. For these lines present us with a somewhat different implication from that suggested in stanza 16. Byron is here more precise and definite in his critical attitude to Napoleon. The comparison between Prometheus and Napoleon suggests a similarity between the two, while that similarity is at the same time denied. Napoleon could have been a Prometheus perhaps, and perhaps he is a Prometheus *manqué*, but in these lines he is portrayed as the very antithesis of Prometheus. Their respective offences were dissimilar not only in deed but in motive, and hence - although Byron states otherwise, the 'fate' of each was, from an aetiological point of view, also dissimilar. Prometheus brought 'life' to mankind; Napoleon made that life 'desolate'. Prometheus stole from 'Heaven' (the emblem

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1. In his Journal entry, in the epigraph to the Ode - by way of Juvenal; and as we have noted, in certain structural similarities.
  2. PW. III, 459, 456 and 269.
  3. PW. III, 269.



of good, towards which man aspires); Napoleon sought to extend the boundaries of his 'native Hell' (the emblem of evil, from which man recoils). And thus the word 'flame' is splendidly resonant. In the case of Prometheus, it is the 'flame' of enlightenment - a beneficent, positive and creative gift to man; in the case of Napoleon, it is the 'flame' of destruction - the spreading of death, discord and evil. Thus, though they both 'fell' (and in this only is their 'fate' 'like'), they 'fell' from importantly dissimilar causes. Prometheus' act was prompted by sympathy towards humanity: he acted generously and selflessly, and therefore the 'fate' he suffered for so doing was a form of self-sacrifice. Napoleon, on the contrary, acted from no such altruistic impulses: he sought merely to reduce mankind to his ego, to master the world. And so the 'fate' he suffered he earned through his selfish megalomania. Although both Prometheus and Napoleon 'fell' because of their pride (hubris), the nature of their respective forms of pride is altered by the one's selflessness and the other's selfishness.

That Byron obviously conceives of Napoleon here as being Satan himself, accords well with such similar suggestions made throughout the Ode. Thus these "couplets" not only act as a 'pendant' to stanza 16 but are congruent with the 'Morning Star' ambiguity of stanza 1, the image of which is re-iterated in stanza 11, and re-inforces the evil aspect of 'Dark Spirit' of stanza 4, and the 'All Evil Spirit' of stanza 9, and picks up on the 'Desolator desolate' of stanza 5. What these lines emphasize ultimately, then, is the difference in moral action between Prometheus and Napoleon. But their more <sup>does</sup> downright assertiveness  not blend harmoniously with the characteristic and suggestive ambiguity of either stanza 16 or the Ode as a whole. What is interesting, however, is to see how sharply Napoleon brought to Byron's mind the image of Prometheus.

One final observation: both the above lines and the final line of stanza 16, are in pentameters. Each stanza in the Ode (other than stanza 16)

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ends with a tetrameter - as we have already noted. The pentameter in stanza 16 lends to the sense of the Ode's ending properly with that stanza. And, if the above lines are strictly speaking a 'pendant' (as McGann suggests) to that same stanza (developing, defining, reducing the idea stanza 16 raises), then that stanza's concluding the Ode is even further supported; and thus McGann's decision to exclude the 'Additional Stanzas' from the accepted reading of Ode is materially justified.

Byron's next major comment concerning Napoleon occurs almost exactly a year after the Ode. On February 26th, 1815, Napoleon escaped from Elba and by March 20th was in Paris. When the news reached Byron, he wrote to Moore (March 27th, 1815):

Napoleon - but the papers will have told you all. I quite think with you upon the subject, and for my real thoughts this time last year, I would refer you to the last pages of the Journal I gave you. I can forgive the rogue for utterly falsifying every line of mine Ode ...

Making every allowance for talent and the most consummate daring, there is, after all, a good deal in luck or destiny. ... But he is certainly Fortune's favourite, and

Once fairly set out on his party of pleasure,  
Taking towns at his liking and crowns at his leisure,  
From Elba to Lyons and Paris he goes,  
Making balls for the ladies, and bows to his foes.

... If he can take France by himself, the devil's in't if he don't repulse the invaders, when backed by those celebrated swordsmen - those boys of the blade, the Imperial Guard, and the old and new army. It is impossible not to be dazzled and overwhelmed by his character and career. Nothing ever so disappointed me as his abdication, and nothing could have reconciled me to him but some such revival as his recent exploit; though no one could anticipate such a complete and brilliant renovation.<sup>1</sup>

The lightness of touch here is eloquent of Byron's delight at Napoleon's 'renovation' and compares well with the bewilderment of the Journal entry after Napoleon's first abdication, and the sullen exasperation at his ultimate defeat in 1815.<sup>2</sup> The verse itself, though little more than doggerel and most probably occasioned by a comment in the Morning Chronicle of the same date as

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1. LJ. IV, 284/5
  2. LJ. IV, 302, see post.

this letter,<sup>1</sup> captures the buoyancy of Byron's mood, not only in content but also in its form: the humorous feminine endings of the first two lines and the anapaestic measure overall. But amongst all this euphoria several serious and important points emerge. Principally what earns Byron's admiration and approval here is that Napoleon has returned to where he ought to be. The words 'revival' and 'renovation' (coming back to life, and renewing oneself), suggest that in Byron's view Napoleon has reconciled himself with his destiny and with himself (from both of which his abdication was an aberration): he is acting in character, true to self. By reclaiming his position, by re-asserting himself, Napoleon redeems his honour and has a second chance of proving his Promethean (as against Satanic) stature. Without wishing to labour the point unduly, it is worth noting the return to the 'light' imagery in this passage: 'dazzled and overwhelmed', 'brilliant' and even 'revival' and 'renovation'. The concept of 'Fortune' that arises here seems successfully to dispose, once and for all, of Hazlitt's accusation. When Napoleon abdicated, he appeared to Byron not as one who "looks on tempests and is never shaken", but rather as one who was indeed 'a pipe for Fortune's finger, ... to play what stop she pleases on.' And this recognition, no doubt, is what made Byron revise his 'system of fatalism'<sup>2</sup>: he is now wary of 'Fortune' because she has proved fickle. Despite those attributes of heroism which Byron here defines as 'talent and the most consummate daring', the successful hero must also have 'luck or destiny' - the 'luck or destiny' of being 'Fortune's favourite'. In the case of Napoleon, 'Fortune' deserted him on a previous occasion (1813/14) - which prompted Byron to conclude that 'all this' (i.e. the phenomenon of Napoleon with its concomitant promise of a republic and 'prelude to greater changes'), was indeed 'a mere jeu of the gods'<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps 'Fortune' would desert him again. Hence Byron's cautious 'there is, after all, a good deal

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1. PW. III. 464.

2. LJ. III, 218.

3. LJ. III, 218.

in luck or destiny', which qualifies the first part of that sentence, and possibly questions the assertiveness of 'certainty' in the next sentence. Byron returns to 'Fortune' under another guise ('Providence'), after Napoleon's final downfall in 1815.<sup>1</sup>

But, to continue in the spirit of the above letter, it was with his hopes and expectations of Napoleon thus revitalized that Byron heard of his defeat at Waterloo (June 18th, 1815). Byron's first reaction is recorded by Ticknor, who was paying him a visit when the news arrived. Their conversation was interrupted (June 20th, 1815):

Sir James Bland Burgess ... came suddenly into the room, and said abruptly, 'My Lord, my lord, a great battle has been fought in the low Countries, and Bonaparte is entirely defeated.' 'But is it true?' said Lord Byron, - 'is it true?' 'Yes, my lord, it is certainly true; Bonaparte is in full retreat towards Paris.' After an instant's pause, Lord Byron replied, 'I am d--d sorry for it'; and then, after another slight pause, he added, 'I didn't know but I might live to see Lord Castlereagh's head on a pole. But I suppose I shan't now.'<sup>2</sup>

The reaction is muted, but characteristic: first the incredulity, then the euphemistic 'I'm d--d sorry for it', then the aggression towards Castlereagh. The disappointment is matched (and these last two points picked up on), in his earliest written reaction to the news in a letter to Moore (July 7th, 1815):

Every hope of a republic is over, and we must go on under the old system. But I am sick at heart of politics and slaughters; and the luck which Providence is pleased to lavish on Lord \* \* Castlereagh is only a proof of the little value the gods set upon prosperity, when they permit such \* \* \* as he and that drunken corporal, old Blucher, to bully their betters. From this, however, Wellington should be excepted. He is a man, - and the Scipio of our Hannibal. However, he may thank the Russian frosts, which destroyed the real élite of the French army, for his successes of Waterloo.

This is the only serious passage in an otherwise facetious and lighthearted letter to Moore; and such a context, by juxtaposition, perhaps brings into

- 
1. See post, LJ. IV, 302.
  2. His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron, Ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (New York ; Macmillan, 1954,) p. 126.
  3. LJ. IV, 302.

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greater relief the depth of Byron's disgust with 'politics and slaughters'. It is true that there is not the anger and emotion which we found in his Journal after Napoleon's first abdication, but, as has been suggested previously, the tone here does seem to be one of sullen exasperation - a sense of exhaustion and hopeless resignation. Byron was 'sick at heart' with politics because they had become wholly absorbed by 'slaughters'. In a postscript to an earlier letter to Hunt, Byron had exclaimed, "Politics!" - the barking of the wardogs for their carrion has sickened me of them for the present.<sup>1</sup> And these 'slaughters' - the policy of war by which politics had become engrossed, sought merely to continue the existing status quo ('the old system') and repress all republican and reformatory tendencies. All Byron's hopes of Napoleon as a 'prelude to greater changes'<sup>2</sup> were now finally destroyed. The fickleness of 'Providence' ('Fortune') was confirmed by her shortsighted assistance to Castlereagh, and 'the gods' had indeed proved that 'all this was their 'mere jeu' inexplicably unjust and unreasonable in its favouring Napoleon's inferiors. Byron's obsessive hatred of Castlereagh owes itself to various causes<sup>3</sup>, but in this passage one reason at least reveals itself. Castlereagh was Foreign Secretary from 1812 to his death (1822), and thus administered the policy against Napoleon. In his capacity as such he was regarded by Byron as the chief **opponent** to Napoleon. This in turn is one reason why Wellington is here exempted from Byron's vituperation: he was merely an instrument in the hands of Castlereagh - the pawn of the policy he was bound to serve.<sup>4</sup> Yet, while Byron is at first generous to Wellington, 'He is a man' - implying that Castlereagh is not 'a man',<sup>5</sup> his praise is immediately qualified by the

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1. May-June 1st, 1815, LJ. IV, 295.

2. LJ. III, 218.

3. For example, see Don Juan, 'Dedication', 11/15.

4. This is not to say, however, that he was to escape Byron's sharp criticism later, see Don Juan, IX, 1/10.

5. See 'intellectual eunuch' Don Juan, 'Dedication', 11.

suggestion that Wellington only defeated a second-rate, or already routed army. Had he been confronted with the cream, 'the real élite', of the French army - that is, the Grogards, the 'Imperial Guard' or 'veteran hearts' as Byron later calls them<sup>1</sup>, which was wiped out during the catastrophic Moscow Campaign in 1812 (though notice that Byron here blames the elements, 'the Russian frosts', and not human error), had Wellington had to face such a force he would not, Byron suggests, have been so successful. Moreover, while the phrase 'the Scipio of our Hannibal' at first looks like praise, the 'our' instantly tells us with whom Byron's sympathies lie (though, of course, this 'our' can be seen as bringing the historical allusion into the present). And the historical allusion is apt: Waterloo, by inference, being related to the Battle of Zama (202 BC) - the decisive battle between Hannibal and Scipio in which the Carthaginians were routed and which terminated Hannibal's career. It is worth noting in this passage that Napoleon is not referred to explicitly at all, nor is any criticism directed at him. Byron reviles 'Providence', 'the gods', Castlereagh and Blucher. The absence of such reference suggests that in Byron's view Napoleon is in no way to blame for his defeat: that 'luck' had played a greater part than 'talent and the most consummate daring'.<sup>2</sup> The focal point of Byron's attack in the passage is aimed at such abstracts as 'Providence' and 'the gods'. He will concede neither victory to the victors, nor defeat to Napoleon: another unaccountable force was responsible. This last remark may seem vague, but it reflects Byron's vagueness: or perhaps, to be more specific, it reflects Byron's having to come to terms with his disillusion with 'fate', the upheaval of his 'system of fatalism' and his recognition of the whimsicality of 'the gods'. Much of this, indeed most of what has been discussed in connection with the whole of this passage, becomes the

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1. See post, 'Napoleon's Farewell'.

2. LJ. IV, 284.



subject of analysis and refinement in Byron's subsequent poems and poetic passages concerning Napoleon.

The first of these - Byron's first Napoleon poem after Waterloo, is 'Napoleon's Farewell' published anonymously in the Examiner, 30th July 1815.<sup>1</sup> As McGann so justly remarks, 'Napoleon is here at least in part a figural self-projection of B himself.'<sup>2</sup> The anonymity and the subtitle are devices by which Byron wishes to dispel such suspicions. But neither ruse is convincing: Napoleon is a persona through whom Byron makes his critical statements. In the main these are directed at the French, whose disloyalty and lack of courage are seen as being largely responsible for Napoleon's defeat.

Farewell to the Land, where the gloom of my Glory  
Arose and o'ershadowed the earth with her name -  
She abandons me now, - but the page of her story,  
The brightest or blackest, is filled with my fame.  
I have warred with a world which vanquished me only  
When the meteor of Conquest allured me too far;  
I have coped with the nations which dread me thus lonely,  
The last single Captive to millions in war!

I

Farewell to thee, France! - when thy diadem crowned me,  
I made thee the gem and the wonder of earth, -  
But thy weakness decrees I should leave as I found thee,  
Decayed in thy glory, and sunk in thy worth.  
Oh! for the veteran hearts that were wasted  
In strife with the storm, when their battles were won -  
Then the Eagle, whose gaze in that moment was blasted,  
Had still soared with eyes fixed on victory's sun!

2

Farewell to thee, France! - but when Liberty rallies  
Once more in thy regions, remember me then -  
The violet still grows in the depth of thy vallies;  
Though withered, thy tears will unfold it again -  
Yet, yet, I may baffle the hosts that surround us,  
And yet may thy heart leap awake to my voice -  
There are links which must break in the chain that has bound us,  
Then turn thee and call on the Chief of thy choice!

3.

This is restrained, yet powerful poetry; the easy and regular measure captures the energy of the man who is supposed to be speaking (i.e. Napoleon). It also suggests with what facility Byron assumes the persona of Napoleon - which underscores the empathy he feels for him, and McGann's remark concerning the

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1. PW, III, 473.  
2. Ibid.

'figural self-projection of B himself' alluded to above. As we shall see, Byron's use of syntax here is effectively ambiguous which, from a positive point of view, increases the range of suggestion. The first stanza gains its force by the juxtaposition of antithetical ideas and images: light/dark, one/many, finitude/infinity. In the first quatrain, 'Glory', which we should expect to be associated with brightness (the image is that of the sun rising, and relates to the 'meteor' of line 6 and to 'victory's sun' in the final line of stanza 2), is instead revealed as a black Sun or as the spreading of night. It might be argued that the initial image which impresses us here is this last - the spreading of night. But night does not rise, and we shall only have to contend with the complication later on when we arrive at 'brightest or blackest'. No, Byron is deliberately using paradoxical imagery to reflect the different attitudes with which history will regard Napoleon's career. And notice the superlatives, 'brightest or blackest' (italics added), the most reputable or disreputable, which suggest that no one can be indifferent to Napoleon: he arouses extreme reactions. But the paradoxes also reflect the paradoxical nature of Napoleon's 'Glory' and Byron's ambivalent attitude towards him. For instance, is Byron suggesting that Napoleon's 'Glory' is a 'gloom' which 'o'ershadowed the earth' because of the evil character of the business by which it thrived (i.e. war); or is he suggesting that there are two aspects to that 'Glory' - the one of brightness, the other of 'gloom'? The implications seem resonant. We shall follow one direction which itself will split into two. Let us assume that by 'gloom' and 'o'ershadowed' Byron means that Napoleon's 'Glory' has depended on the spreading of misery and war. And that now, although his 'Glory' has deserted him, his 'fame' will nonetheless survive, since the 'story' of that 'Glory' will inevitably speak only of him. That is, he and his 'Glory' and history are inextricably bound together. But another interpretation of these lines seems equally, if not more, viable. This depends on the referent of 'her' (line 2) and 'She' and 'her' (line 3). These can as

plausibly be taken to refer to 'Land' (i.e. France) as to 'Glory'. And in this case Napoleon is saying that his 'Glory' made the 'name' of France a terror to the 'earth', and though she (France) deserts him now yet still that page in her history that records his 'Glory' will be 'filled' with his 'fame'. The only significant change in this last interpretation is that France, rather than 'Glory', 'abandons' Napoleon.

Now all this may seem tortuous and unnecessarily laboured, but the aim is to illustrate how Byron's intentional use of ambiguity and paradox, in what initially appears to be simple verse, makes his poetry all the more suggestive, evocative. For, in fact, both interpretations here need to be recognized in order to grasp the critical point: that when Napoleon's 'Glory' declined, France disowned him, which point is picked up obliquely in the next stanza - and re-iterated in 'From the French'.<sup>1</sup> The irony is, though, that despite France's abandoning him he has made his indelible mark on her history; and thus the persistence of his 'Glory' is ensured (which makes it questionable whether his 'Glory' ever declined in the first place).<sup>2</sup>

The second quatrain exploits the juxtaposition of the singular and the plural ('I', 'me', 'only', 'lonely' and 'single', against 'world', 'nations' and 'millions'). The contrast emphasizes ironically the dominion Napoleon has over his antagonists as a single being - whether as a conqueror or a 'Captive'. Notice here the shift into the present tense in 'dread': the 'nations' still fear him even though he is their 'Captive' (the cause for which is suggested in stanza 3). This belittles Napoleon's opponents, and betrays Byron's admiration and praise for Napoleon's ability to stand, and fall, alone. In this instance, the placing of 'only' is splendidly chosen - poised as it is between 'me' and 'When': we may read it as 'me only' and as 'only/When'. And this captures both the singularity of Napoleon and his own weakness being the cause of his defeat. That weakness is the same as we have

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1. 'From the French', stanza 4, see post.

2. A point most emphatically denied in 'From the French' see post.

already seen suggested in the Ode: Napoleon's losing sight of himself (loss of self-mastery) and being seduced by power, by his hubris. The image of the 'meteor of Conquest' is also consistent with the star imagery in the Ode (as well as that of the first quatrain of this stanza), and suggests a bright, flaming body of energy, hurtling blindly and to its own destruction through the universe. Thus it captures metaphorically Napoleon's career (in its gerundial sense as well), whilst it further suggests the image of the will-o-the-wisp, of Rochester's and Johnson's respective poems noted in connection with stanza 3 of the Ode: so that Napoleon is seen as having pursued something unattainable. At all events, the 'world' and the 'nations' are deprived of any sense of victory: Napoleon's own weakness enabled them to conquer him, not their own strength<sup>1</sup>.

The second stanza shifts the blame for Napoleon's defeat from himself to the pusillanimity of his fellow countrymen. Their 'weakness' can simply be defined as disloyalty or apostasy, as deduced from 'She abandons me now' and the context of the remainder of this stanza. The fickleness of the French, their political vacillation, had already been proved by their welcoming back the Bourbon dynasty in 1814.<sup>2</sup> The men of real worth and loyalty on whom Napoleon could have depended, the 'veteran hearts' had already been lost in the 'Russian frosts'.<sup>3</sup> With such men, the 'Eagle'<sup>4</sup> would have continued to aspire; but without those men, Napoleon was without his self-possession, self-mistrustful; his 'gaze' was 'blasted', when they were 'wasted'. Notice, however, the implication of this, which is subverted by the exclamation: that Napoleon depended upon others. This presents an incongruity at odds with the singleness of mind stressed in the second quatrain of the previous stanza: if

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1. This is re-stated most emphatically in 'Ode: From the French', stanza 2 see post.
  2. For Byron's emotionally fraught reaction at their so doing, see Journal entry, April 19th, 1814, LJ. III, 257.
  3. LJ. IV, 302. See also Don Juan X, 58/59.
  4. Here, Napoleon; but in general Byron's metaphor for any admirable aspiring being - including himself: cf. 'Gaul's Vulture', CHP I, 52 and cf. CHP III, 18, 'here last the eagle flew'.

Napoleon can boast of his ability to stand and fall alone, how comes his complaint that, without his 'veteran hearts', he is vulnerable?<sup>1</sup> While this objection may stand, it is of course Byron speaking through the persona of Napoleon who wishes to stigmatize the French for not being worthy of their leader.

Citing the third stanza in his essay 'Byron's Vacillating Attitude towards Napoleon', Professor James Hogg comments, 'Under the circumstances the claims of the third stanza are decidedly audacious.'<sup>2</sup> One might indeed say that the sentiments of the whole poem are 'audacious' under the circumstances. For, as McGann notes, Napoleon was being held on board the Bellerophon at Torbay, awaiting departure for St. Helena, while Byron was writing this poem.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless it is true that the 'claims' of this stanza are more 'audacious' than those of the previous two in so far as they invoke the memory of Napoleon's escape from Elba, and pose a threat to the restored tranquillity of the European powers. No doubt Byron did indeed suspect, as he had rightly suspected in 1814, that Napoleon would 'play them some trick still',<sup>4</sup> but this time, Byron could not 'lay claim to prophecy'.<sup>5</sup>

The tone of this stanza is positive and hopeful, and Napoleon is explicitly characterized as the champion of 'Liberty'. This gives him the more specific, consistent role we have noted before, as the destroyer of the old order and the inaugurator of the new.<sup>6</sup> What would have been particularly disturbing about this stanza to the European hegemony is the conviction that the spirit of liberty only lies dormant: it has been dissipated but not

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1. Byron avoids this issue here: but he faces it later in CHP, III, 41, see post.
  2. Byron: Poetry and Politics, ed. Sturzl & Hogg. (Salzburg Studies in English Literature, 1981), p. 405.
  3. PW, III, 473.
  4. LJ, IV, 90.
  5. LJ, IV, 126.
  6. 'A prelude to greater changes and mightier events', LJ, III, 218.

defeated. The military word 'rallies' is highly appropriate here; for it expresses both the rallying call of 'Liberty' and the drawing together again of the spirit of liberty into a single force. The image in this first quatrain of France weeping over the 'violet' (the symbol of 'liberty') in order to revive it - curiously pieta-like, is unusually tender, especially in view of the strength of the spirit of liberty and the task it has to perform. But perhaps the emphasis here is on suggesting that liberty is also a fragile or precious thing that needs to be fostered. At all events the violet contrasts suggestively with the image of bondage in the seventh line. Here the chains of tyranny and oppression constitute a concrete and malicious instrument forged by men; whereas the 'violet' is a natural phenomenon rooted in the national psyche ('grows in the depths of thy valleys') which will 'unfold' given the right conditions. The opposition thus set up (between the artificial/the natural, violence/fragility), suggests that where oppression is a destructive and unnatural restraint on man, liberty is something natural and organic (by which is meant, growing, becoming - something dynamic). So that despite the seeming fragility of the violet, its very strength lies in its naturalness: liberty cannot fail to grow.

But what are these 'tears' that are going to revive liberty? Are they those of a France full of remorse and regret for having abandoned Napoleon; or are they those of the misery Napoleon imagines France will suffer under the re-constituted Bourbon regime, and hence, France's mourning the loss of her liberty? Although we have attempted to deal critically with the image here, it is in fact rather a pathetic and sentimental one that tries to carry conviction by its emotional appeal. What is perhaps more interesting is the suggestion that, though Napoleon might return in person (lines 5 & 6), his actual physical presence might not be called for at all. After all, the second line reads 'remember me then' (as in think of me), and the phrase in the final line reads 'call on' (italics added) not 'call for'.<sup>1</sup> What this effectively does is to

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raise Napoleon not only into the symbol of liberty but the god of liberty. Hence France can 'call on' him not in his physical capacity as the champion of liberty, but as the symbol and deity of liberty.

This may seem to be pressing a rather fine point to undue extremes, although Napoleon as a god (or something near it) is consistent with what we have reviewed so far. Certainly, however, such exaltation is present in the next poem Byron was to write concerning Napoleon.

This is entitled 'From the French', though a cover sheet in Lady Byron's hand to Byron's draft reads 'Lines - the Pole to Bonaparte. First copy. 1815.'<sup>1</sup> McGann dates the poem 'between May and Sept. 1814 [sic]'.<sup>2</sup> Since it refers so obviously to Waterloo and to Napoleon's exile to St. Helena, it must however have been written rather towards the end than towards the beginning of this period in, of course, 1815.

In this poem, Byron assumes the persona of an unnamed Polish officer utterly devoted to Napoleon. Indeed, the headnote draws particular attention to this devotion (Byron is quoting from a letter he received from Hobhouse<sup>3</sup>):

All wept, but particularly Savary, and a Polish officer who had been exalted from the ranks by Bonaparte. He clung to his master's knees: wrote a letter to Lord Keith, entreating permission to accompany him, even in the most menial capacity, which could not be admitted.<sup>4</sup>

The sense of such overmastering loyalty and, indeed, love is carried into the poem:

Must thou go, my glorious Chief,  
Severed from thy faithful few?  
Who can tell thy warrior's grief,  
Maddening o'er that long adieu?  
Woman's love, and friendship's zeal,  
Dear as both have been to me -  
What are they to all I feel,  
With a soldier's faith for thee?

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1. PW. III, 474.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. PW. III, 314.



Idol of the soldier's soul!  
First in fight, but mightiest now;  
Many could a world control;  
Thee alone no doom can bow.  
By thy side for years I dared  
Death; and envied those who fell,  
When their dying shout was heard,  
Blessing him they served so well.

2.

Would that I were cold with those,  
Since this hour I live to see,  
When the doubts of coward foes  
Scarce dare trust a man with thee,  
Dreading each should set thee free.  
Oh! although in dungeons pent,  
All their chains were light to me,  
Gazing on thy soul unbent.

3.

Would the sycophants of him  
Now so deaf to duty's prayer,  
Were his borrowed glories dim,  
In his native darkness share?  
Were that world this hour his own,  
All thou calmly dost resign,  
Could he purchase with that throne  
Hearts like those which still are thine?

4.

My chief, my king, my friend, adieu!  
Never did I droop before;  
Never to my sovereign sue,  
As his foes I now implore.  
All I ask is to divide  
Every peril he must brave;  
Sharing by the hero's side  
His fall, his exile, and his grave.

5.

This is virtually a love poem: the religious vocabulary and the extreme emotion of the apostrophe exalt Napoleon into a god and suggest an almost transcendent adoration of him. The emphasis on faith in the first stanza which passes the love of woman and the 'zeal' of friendship; the desire to die for the 'Idol' (even as others have died, 'Blessing him'), to be imprisoned with him, and eventually to share Napoleon's 'fall, his exile, and his grave', such sentiments and self-abnegation indicate an attachment of no common order. Indeed, this is worship. The whole poem captures that 'spell upon the minds of men'<sup>1</sup> that Napoleon cast, and the depth of the devotion he was capable of inspiring in others (shared, not least by Byron,

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1. Ode, stanza 3.

which is why the little anecdote concerning the Pole clearly had such a peculiarly strong appeal to him). As was suggested above, there is no question whatsoever as to Napoleon's 'Glory' having in any way declined, even after his fall: indeed, quite the opposite. He is here regarded as 'First in fight, but mightiest now' (italics added), and the reason is contained in the same stanza: 'Many could a world control;/Thee alone no doom can bow.' (See also stanza 3, line 8, and stanza 4, line 6). The whole tenor of the apostrophe is praise for a 'Chief' who is 'glorious' in power and in defeat, and he is 'glorious' in the latter condition because he is able to bear his misfortune so 'calmly', so nobly. The theme struck here<sup>1</sup>, is that the manner in which a man bears his misfortune is the proof of his nobility or ignobility.

As can be seen, the persona addresses Napoleon directly throughout the poem as 'thou', 'thy', 'thee', except in the final two stanzas. In the case of stanza 5, the reference to him in the third person is perfectly justifiable since the persona turns from Napoleon to plead with 'his foes'. But this is not the case in stanza 4. Although this stanza restates the point raised in stanzas 1 and 2 of 'Napoleon's Farewell' that Napoleon was deserted after his fall by his former followers, its rhetoric and moral tone strike a discordant note with the rest of the poem: it is a digression, an aside, in the general flow of the apostrophe. Here Byron the poet seems to be speaking in his own poetic voice, not in that of the persona he has assumed; and thus the fictive authority of the persona is (if only for the duration of one stanza) weakened. Byron's authorial intervention undermines the persona's semblance of reality which we have been willing to accept. Besides, the stanza is clumsy, particularly in the second quatrain. The meaning is clear enough: that even if the world were still Napoleon's he would never have such faithful followers as those whose loyalty has now been proved (which also suggests that loyalty is proved by its firmness in misfortune). But the alternation between 'his', 'thou',

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1. And re-iterated in GHP, III, 39, see post.

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'he' and 'thine' is awkward, even if Byron is trying to set up some distinction between the conditional (Napoleon as he was before his fall, or as he might be speculatively in the future, lines 5 & 7), and the present (Napoleon as he is now, lines 6 & 8), which seems extremely improbable. Moreover, lines 3 & 4 of the stanza are suggestive in a manner inconsistent with the remainder of the poem. The persona has in no way implied that Napoleon's 'glories' were or might have been 'borrowed',<sup>1</sup> nor, even more emphatically, has he suggested that 'darkness' is or was 'native' to Napoleon.<sup>2</sup> The whole poem contradicts any such ideas. It is possible that the persona is reflecting a common view about Napoleon rather than making a statement about him. In which case a paraphrase might run thus: if Napoleon's 'glories' were really only 'borrowed' ones, which have now grown 'dim' or were 'dim' (dark) in the first place, would his 'sycophants' still share the 'darkness' (evil) that is his 'native' condition. That is, would his flatterers still stick to Napoleon if he really showed himself up as being evil (or the Devil) - with the implied answer, of course, in the negative. Obviously the essential point being made here is that those who flattered Napoleon when he was in power, now reject him. But the lines do posit certain assumptions which have not been raised elsewhere in the poem and are alien to it; and the stanza as a whole seems an unsatisfactory intrusion into the persona's address.

The final poem in this series directly concerned with Napoleon is the 'Ode: From the French', which was written in early March and published anonymously in the Morning Chronicle, 15th March 1816. The following lines (22/35) which are relevant to the present study, comprise the whole of stanza 2.

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1. Cf. Macbeth, I, iii, 109; but compare the Ode, 'Additional Stanzas', 2(18).
  2. Cf. 'Prometheus and Napoleon', 'native Hell'.
  3. PW, III, 491.

The Chief has fallen, but not by you,  
Vanquishers of Waterloo!  
When the soldier citizen  
Swayed not o'er his fellow men -  
Save in deeds that led them on  
Where Glory smiled on Freedom's son -  
Who, of all the despots banded,  
With that youthful chief competed?  
Who could boast o'er France defeated,  
Till lone tyranny commanded?  
Till, goaded by ambition's sting,  
The Hero sunk into the King?  
Then he fell; - So perish all,  
Who would men by man enthrall!<sup>1</sup>

This re-iterates much of what we have noted so far in simple and direct verse which, though it contains various subtleties, presents no problems as to interpretation. The opening lines state that those who won at Waterloo did not cause the fall of Napoleon (which thus deprives them of any glorious victory), and the subsequent lines develop the proposition. 'Glory smiled on Freedom's son' while he remained a 'soldier citizen' fighting against 'the despots banded'. As such, Napoleon was a 'Hero'. But when 'ambition' stung him on to seek for himself the very power and position ('King') against which he had struggled, then 'he fell' and France was defeated.<sup>2</sup> In effect, Napoleon's desire to be a 'King' was a recognition of the validity of the system it was his mission to destroy. From being Freedom's champion, as in 'Napoleon's Farewell', stanza 3, he turned apostate and became himself a tyrant. But, he became a 'lone' tyrant which distinguishes him from the 'despots banded', and thus, together with his youth ('youthful' implying vigour and youth, and also implying the age of the 'despots'), reprieves him to a certain extent in Byron's eyes. For the 'despots' had to band together in order to defeat him; not one of them dared compete with him singly. Thus Byron manages to balance forcefully in these lines his censure and praise of Napoleon, and his scorn of those who defeated him. The final two lines, with their general and moral conclusion, take us into Byron's consideration of Napoleon in Childe Harold, Canto III.

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1. PW. III, 376.

2. Cf. the Ode, and 'Napoleon's Farewell', stanza 1.

However, before turning immediately to this, some suggestions concerning Byron's use of persona seem to arise from the above discussion. Professor Hogg has suggested that Byron's use of persona in these poems 'makes their interpretation somewhat problematical'.<sup>1</sup> By this I take it that he means that it is difficult to establish clearly Byron's view, intention or attitude from these poems, which, from what we have discussed, seems questionable. The persona not only serves as a foil to Byron's own emotional identity with Napoleon (as in 'Napoleon's Farewell'), or to his sympathy and admiration of him (as in 'From the French'), but it also lends itself to his evocative and suggestive use of paradox and ambiguity which reflect, not his 'vacillating' but his ambivalent attitude. Besides, while these poems may stand on their own, it is surely fair to review them in the context of Byron's whole treatment of Napoleon - to see them as part of one continuous discourse. They are not isolated fragments but represent stages in a meditation on a single theme. Byron himself, writing to Hunt and enclosing 'Napoleon's Farewell' for anonymous publication, states that 'it certainly does not contain your political sentiments nor indeed my own altogether - but I have endeavoured to adapt them to the person speaking'.<sup>2</sup> This is all very well and plausible, and may be compared with his statement to Moore concerning his creative experience.<sup>3</sup> But one wonders why Byron felt obliged to make any such apology for the poem (which apology can also apply to 'From the French'). And, that 'altogether' is good; it virtually retracts the statement of which it is a part. At all events and despite Byron's caveat, our attention cannot be diverted from his choice of personae. Clearly he chose Napoleon and he chose the Polish officer because each suggested themes or ideas which he himself could or wanted to express about Napoleon. The passage from the letter to Hunt stresses the

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1. 'Byron's Vacillating Attitude towards Napoleon', loc. cit.

2. LJ. IV, 307.

3. LJ. IX, 118/119.

'political sentiments'; but, for all Byron's attempting to 'adapt them to the person speaking', they nonetheless remain his own poetic rendition of them. Indeed, besides the reason given above (a foil), although the persona is apparently used as a vehicle by which Byron can distance himself and his feelings from his subject (i.e. Napoleon) - achieve some objective perspective, it in fact operates quite counter to this. It actually draws him nearer to his poetic creation, nearer to 'the person speaking'; so that the 'political sentiments' Byron is supposed to be adapting to that 'person speaking', are merely a reflection, or a close poetic approximation, of his own. It was suggested in our discussion of 'From the French' stanza 4, that the voice speaking at that point was not that of the persona Byron had assumed, but the poetic voice of Byron himself. Since the stanza also happens to be re-iterating a view expressed in stanzas 1 and 2 of 'Napoleon's Farewell', a certain doubt is cast upon the credibility of the persona qua persona. Thus, however much Byron (or we) may insist that it is a persona speaking in these poems, the distinction between it and the poetic voice of Byron seems to be negligible. His choice of persona, the facility with which he slips into it, and the fluency with which he articulates those expressions attributed to the persona, suggest that there is no more difference between it (as a persona, not necessarily as to Byron's treatment of it) and the persona of Childe Harold. Harold, and each of the personae in these poems are, as McGann has it, 'figural self-projection[s] of B himself'.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, I suggest that the 'interpretation' of these poems is no more 'problematical' than is that of Childe Harold.<sup>2</sup>

We now come to Byron's maturest and most cogent consideration of Napoleon, Childe Harold III, 36/45.<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, only stanzas 36/41

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1. PW. III, 473.

2. For a detailed discussion of Byron's use of Harold in Childe Harold, see Fiery Dust. Byron's Poetic Development. Jerome J. McGann (Chicago, 1968), particularly Chapter 2, 68/90.

3. PW. II, 89/93.

deal directly with Napoleon; but importantly, in stanzas 42/45, Byron develops out of his analysis of Napoleon a profoundly understanding assessment of the psychology of aspiration and ambition generally. This in itself is an indication of his maturity and of a greater objectivity; and one reason for his seriousness and depth of thought is that by this time (1816) he himself had suffered a similar reversal of fortune. Hence his treatment of Napoleon also represents an attempt to come to terms with his own situation and, through that, to an appraisal of the condition of such like men generally. This is an important point to bear in mind throughout the following discussion.

Having captured magnificently, though with grim irony and bathos, the turmoil of Waterloo (stanzas 21/28), Byron turns thus to Napoleon:

There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men,  
Whose spirit antithetically mixt  
One moment of the mightiest, and again  
On little objects with like firmness fixt,  
Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,  
Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;  
For daring made thy rise as fall: thou seek'st  
Even now to re-assume the imperial mien,  
And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene! 36

Conqueror and captive of the earth art thou!  
She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name  
Was ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now  
That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame,  
Who wooed thee once, thy vassal, and became  
The flatterer of thy fierceness, till thou wert  
A god unto thyself; nor less the same  
To the astounded kingdoms all inert,  
Who deem'd thee for a time whate'er thou didst assert. 37

Oh, more or less than man - in high or low,  
Battling with nations, flying from the field;  
Now making monarchs' necks thy footstool, now  
More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield;  
An empire thou couldst crush, command, rebuild,  
But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,  
However deeply in men's spirits skill'd,  
Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of war,  
Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest star. 38

This is fine verse, and its quality is sustained. The operative word is 'antithetically', and Byron's irony and bathos exploits the use of antitheses to the full. In stanza 36, antitheses are used in order to reflect the



antithetical nature of Napoleon: 'greatest'/'worst', 'mightiest'/'little objects', 'Extreme'/'betwixt', 'been thine'/'never been', 'rise'/'fall'. These contribute to the central point this stanza is making: that the quality of extreme 'daring' which was essential to Napoleon's 'rise' in the first place, was, ironically, also the very quality which led to his 'fall'. Or, to put it another way round (as does Byron), had Napoleon been moderate once he had achieved the 'throne' he would still be in possession of it; yet, ironically again, such moderation would never have gained him the 'throne' in the first place. What this stanza emphasizes then is the duality of energy, its positive and destructive aspects which Byron will develop even more forcefully in the later stanzas we shall be looking at. Byron's own ambivalence towards Napoleon is also reflected in this stanza: in the first line Napoleon is presented as a man, in the final line as a god (Zeus); and the stanza moves from the indirect third person presentation, to the direct address to Napoleon in the second person, so that a greater intimacy is established with him, and Byron's criticism becomes more personalized. But that criticism is splendidly muted by the syntactical ambiguity of the first line in which the 'nor' plays such a crucial part. Are we to read the line as 'There sunk neither the greatest, nor the worst of men'? or, 'There sunk the greatest, not the worst of men'? or even, 'There sunk the greatest, but not for that the worst of men'? This last possibility questions the status of greatness rather than the man who achieves it, and, with the stress in the line falling on the words 'greatest' and 'worst' (thus associating the two), implies that it is inherently evil. We cannot answer any of these with certainty - which is exactly Byron's intention. For, such deliberate ambiguity, extending the range of possible interpretations, lends to the suggestivity of his verse. Thus, not only does it preserve Byron's own attitude from formal definition, but by defying precise definition of Napoleon as well, it reflects his (Napoleon's) elusive and inexplicable nature also. Indeed, any definition of Napoleon would inevitably limit or contain him, and would thus negate

Byron's presentation of him as a man of unbounded infinite energy. Hence, ambiguity is one of Byron's most subtle poetic devices.

And its use is continued into stanza 37. Again the first line sets the trend; Napoleon is and was both a 'Conqueror' and a 'captive' of the earth. He was its 'captive' when its 'Conqueror', since he was then in its thrall - possessed by the desire to master it. He is now, although its 'captive', no less its 'Conqueror', because of the awe he still inspires in men. The use of the present tense throughout the first four lines cannot be ignored here. Indeed, it seems that Napoleon's claim over men's minds is even greater than it was when he was in power ('ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now'). This recalls the idea raised in the first stanza of 'Napoleon's Farewell'; but it also seems to refute the issue raised in lines 5/7 of stanza 3 of the Ode, insofar as the 'spell' cast over men's minds by Napoleon has not been broken. Of course there is also the straightforward reading of the first line here: once a 'Conqueror' but now a 'captive', which draws an ironic contrast between Napoleon's former and present state. But again, no one reading should be accepted or dismissed; the presence of each should be recognized in order to do justice to Byron.

The personification of 'Fame' seems to embrace the idea of Napoleon's fame (in the possessive sense), with that of the fame he has, the myth created, in the minds of men. And this effectively emphasizes the dependence of the former upon the latter;<sup>1</sup> his fame depends upon 'fama'. And again, we should not overlook the abstract idea of 'Fame', or 'Rumour' (as 'Fama' is more often than not translated), as she appears in the classical epic. Napoleon is the 'jest' of 'Fame', because at first she regarded him as a god and encouraged him to think so too; and, when she had successfully so influenced him, she condemned him for it.<sup>2</sup> He is thus the sport, the 'jest', of 'Fame': a mere

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1. Cf. 'Men's thoughts were the steps which paved thy throne', stanza 41, see post.

2. Which reminds us of the 'sycophants' of 'From the French', stanza 4.

plaything subject to her whimsical and fickle nature. But he is also now the 'jest' - the joke, the laughing stock, amongst men, which suggests a secondary and ironically bathetic reading of the third line, and, in particular, the apparent gravity of the word 'bruted'. The underlying criticism aimed at Napoleon is that he should not have allowed himself to be deluded by the flattery of fame; his having done so is an instance of his lack of self-mastery. The mirror-like image of a 'god unto thyself' captures all the vanity, the loss of perspective and the intoxication with success of the egoist; but, importantly, of the egoist who is imprisoned by his egoism, trapped in himself - fascinated by his own reflection and unable to look out beyond himself.<sup>1</sup> The point, of course, picks up and extends much of what we have seen before, particularly in the Ode, stanza 2, 'gazing on thyself grown blind'. Nonetheless, as the final two lines of this stanza show, the 'astounded kingdoms' did believe that Napoleon was the god he pretended to be (the rhyme 'inert'/'assert' presents a splendid contrast, suggesting the subservience of the one, and the dominance of the other), and are thus not exempt from Byron's irony: the words 'astounded' and 'inert', and the whole of the final line, combine to mock the weakness and gullibility of the 'kingdoms' who were so easily persuaded to believe in the assertions of one man. (Is there possibly the suggestion in this final line of Jahweh's 'I am what I am'; which, on the lips of a man, is perhaps the ultimate in egoism?)

Stanza 38, while continuing in the antithetical vein and preserving Napoleon's elusive nature, becomes more specific as to his actions. These too have been inconsistent or ambivalent: he has shown bravery, but also cowardice; power, but also weakness. But it is the second part of this stanza which is

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1. This point Byron has touched on concerning himself, in an earlier stanza of the poem, 'He would not yield dominion of his mind' (Childe Harold III, 12 /PW. II, 81/); and it is a theme to which he returns often again, during and after 1816, and which will be the subject of the next chapter.

the most illuminating as regards his conflicting character, and which seems to expand on the issues suggested in the more general stanza 36. The juxtaposing of 'empire' and 'pettiest passion', and of 'men's spirits' and his own, indicates that Napoleon was capable of governing external actions and even of understanding human nature ('men's spirits'), but that he was incapable of governing himself and of applying his knowledge of human nature to his own person. The Socratic 'know thyself' is clearly in evidence here, suggesting that without self-knowledge there can be no self-control. Hence the last two phrases of the stanza, both of which re-iterate points we have already encountered: Napoleon's inability to resist the 'lust of war', and his pressing his advantage too far. Yet, again in this final line there is the suggestion that 'Fate', like 'Fame' (and like 'Providence' and 'the gods'), has proved fickle and an apostate. Napoleon had certainly 'tempted' 'Fate' by overreaching himself; but perhaps she is always perversely 'tempted' to leave the 'loftiest star', which would relieve Napoleon, be it only minimally, from the whole onus of blame.

In the next three stanzas, Byron turns to sympathize - though not uncritically, with Napoleon in his fall:

Yet well thy soul hath brook'd the turning tide  
With that untaught innate philosophy,  
Which, be it wisdom, coldness, or deep pride,  
Is gall and wormwood to an enemy.  
When the whole host of hatred stood hard by,  
To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou has smiled  
With a sedate and all-enduring eye; -  
When Fortune fled her spoil'd and favourite child,  
He stood unbowed beneath the ills upon him piled.

39.

Sager than in thy fortunes; for in them  
Ambition steel'd thee on too far to show  
That just habitual scorn which could condemn  
Men and their thoughts; 'twas wise to feel, not so  
To wear it ever on thy lip and brow,  
And spurn the instruments thou wert to use  
Till they were turn'd unto thine overthrow;  
'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose;  
So hath it proved to thee, and all such lot who choose.

40.

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'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose;  
So hath it proved to thee, and all such lot who choose.

40.

If, like a tower upon a headlong rock,  
 Thou hadst been made to stand or fall alone,  
 Such scorn of man had help'd to brave the shock;  
 But men's thoughts were the steps which paved thy throne,  
Their admiration thy best weapon shone;  
 The part of Philip's son was thine, not then  
 (Unless aside thy purple had been thrown)  
 Like stern Diogenes to mock at men;  
 For sceptred cynics earth were far too wide a den. 41.

The last two lines of the first stanza here seem to support the above contention as to the unreliability of 'Fate'. The personification of 'Fortune'<sup>1</sup> links her to 'Fate', 'Providence' and 'the gods', and indeed it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between the four from the way in which Byron uses them: each seems able to act as surrogate for the others.

The change from the direct address of the first seven lines of this stanza, to the third person statement in its concluding two, suggests that Byron is making a public appeal for admiration of Napoleon's ability to endure. This is certainly what he admires in his more intimate personal address: Napoleon's bearing his fall with such equanimity.<sup>2</sup> The image in the final line, suggesting Atlas bearing up the world (a world of woes), effectively conveys the firmness with which he withstood his misfortunes: 'He stood unbowed', the phrase is economic and weighty - each word bearing a stress.<sup>3</sup> But far more effective and characteristically consistent with Byron's portrayal of Napoleon, is the image of the smile and, more particularly, the 'eye'.<sup>4</sup> For the nature of the 'eye', which reflects Napoleon's 'soul' (line 1), is magnificently rendered by the words 'sedate' and 'all-enduring': 'sedate' suggests

1. Reminding us of Byron's comment in his letter to Moore, 'But he is certainly Fortune's favourite', LJ. IV, 284.
2. Cf. 'From the French,' stanza 2.
3. Compare the less economical and less freighted phrases of the first drafts of the line: 'Still hath he stood/Still stood he yet' [PW. II, 91]. The 'Still' and 'stood' are excellent. But 'stood' and 'unbowed' suggest both fixity and posture as well as 'Still', and thus the present reading is more compact.
4. Cf. Childe Harold I, 39. Incidentally, both these are the most salient features of his verse tale heroes. The smile, or lip, generally expresses scorn, cynicism, contempt; while the eye expresses, amongst other things, defiance, pride, indifference or 'coldness', as Byron here has it.

regal and calm as well as firm assurance, or fixedness (as in a combination of the Latin 'sedare' and 'sedere'); while 'all-enduring' suggests not only its ability to bear all, but to harden itself against all (as in 'durare'). Hence 'brook'd', in the first line, is peculiarly apt since it carries the sense of both stemming the 'turning tide', and being able to bear the sight of the 'turning tide'. Such economy and resonance give a concentrated strength to that 'eye' (with its additional punning sense of the single 'I') which can so meet the congregated look of the 'whole host of hatred' who 'watch and mock'. Here too, the smile of contempt contributes its force. And together they attest to the psychological superiority of Napoleon which confounds his victors and deprives them of total victory: for his spirit ('soul'), which the 'eye' and the smile represent, has not been crushed.

However, as stanza 40 goes on to illustrate, although Byron does not condemn Napoleon for feeling contempt for 'Men and their thoughts' (the 'scorn', after all, is 'just' and 'wise to feel'), he does condemn him for having shown it so demonstrably when in power. This was shortsighted and impolitic, since he had depended upon 'Men and their thoughts' for his success.<sup>1</sup> And, exacerbated by such contempt, those same 'instruments' had eventually turned against him and hastened his 'overthrow'. Implicit here is the criticism that Napoleon should not have so depended upon men, for the very reason that they are contemptible: "'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose'.<sup>2</sup> Napoleon may have recognized the truth of this statement, but he had not acted upon it: he was compelled, in every sense of the word, to 'prove' it.

These points are continued into stanza 41. But, despite the effective opening image, various inconsistencies arise. For instance, line 3 ('Such scorn of men had help'd to brave the shock') conflicts with the final line of stanza 39 ('He stood unbowed beneath the ills upon him piled'), and the first

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1. Cf. Stanza 37; also stanza 41, lines 4/5.

2. Cf. the Ode, stanza 7.

of stanza 40 ('Sager than in thy fortunes'). It also retracts the praising of Napoleon throughout stanza 39.<sup>1</sup> This is awkward. Again, the allusion to Alexander and Diogenes suggests that Napoleon's understanding of human nature was circumscribed; that he was not 'skill'd' 'deeply in men's spirits'.<sup>2</sup> Since he had depended on 'men's thoughts', he should at least have shown the considerateness and respect to all men that Alexander showed,<sup>3</sup> rather than the cynicism of Diogenes. Byron adds a revealing footnote to this stanza:

The great error of Napoleon, 'if we have writ our annals true', was a continued obtrusion on mankind of his want of all community of feelings for or with them; perhaps more offensive to human vanity than the active cruelty of more trembling and suspicious tyranny.

Such were his speeches to public assemblies as well as individuals; and the single expression which he is said to have used on returning to Paris after the Russian winter had destroyed his army, rubbing his hands over a fire, 'This is pleasanter than Moscow', would probably alienate more favour from his cause than the destruction and reverses which led to the remark.<sup>4</sup>

The criticism is sharper in this passage. No doubt Byron took a little private pleasure in recounting the 'single expression' of the second paragraph, but clearly he finds Napoleon's lack of humanity, his insensitivity and callousness (which the phrase 'want of all community of feeling' so economically encapsulates) reprehensible. While this seems to support the suggestion above that Napoleon's knowledge of human nature was limited, it also brings two further points to the fore. Firstly, that in Byron's view such 'want of all community of feeling' discredited Napoleon's stature in the eyes of men ('alienate/d more favour from his cause'), more than the actual 'cruelty' of his 'tyranny' or the 'reverses' of his fortunes<sup>5</sup>. And secondly, arising from this, is the

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1. Cf. 'From the French', stanza 2.

2. Cf. stanza 38, line 7.

3. See Arrian, The Campaigns of Alexander.

4. PW. II, 304.

5. Cf. stanza 40 and Byron's condemnation of Napoleon for showing his contempt.



implicit priority Byron gives this 'community of feeling' over mere action. The reference to Alexander in the stanza strengthens the point: action is only noble or heroic if it is accompanied by common sympathy and respect for human dignity (a resolution which Byron himself put into practice when he joined the Greek cause). Napoleon's shortsightedness in this instance was his failure to know his cue - what 'part' to play appropriate to his position ('The part of Philip's son' [*italics added*]). The theatrical vocabulary is deliberate. For, as the last four lines of the stanza suggest, unless like Sylla he had abdicated<sup>1</sup>, Napoleon should have resisted expressing any such 'offensive' personal feelings at all, but should have acted the publicly acceptable role his position required of him. That is, if the sway of a 'sceptred cynic' is to be effective, he must observe the distinction in himself between the man and the king.

It is at this point in his discussion that Byron draws away from the specific example of Napoleon in order to make a more universally applicable analysis of the psychology of aspiration. The movement itself is significant; for Napoleon is no longer regarded as an isolated and unique phenomenon, but as related to a certain human type or types - to which Byron also sees himself as belonging. Here then is where the self-analysis really begins, and implicit throughout is the sense of superiority Byron clearly feels he has over Napoleon (principally, because he can so analyse himself).

But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,  
And there hath been thy bane; there is a fire  
And motion of the soul which will not dwell  
In its own narrow being, but aspire  
Beyond the fitting medium of desire;  
And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,  
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire  
Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,  
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

42.

This renders perfectly into poetry what may be considered its prose counterpart, written three years earlier in a letter to Annabella (September 6, 1813):

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1. Cf. the Ode, stanza 7.

The great object of life is Sensation - to feel that we exist - even though in pain - it is this 'craving void' which drives us to Gaming - to Battle - to Travel - to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

The 'hell' of the stanza, is precisely the "craving void"<sup>2</sup> of the letter; while 'high adventure' reflects the 'Sensation' and 'agitation' the letter describes. But the letter seems more a rationalization of the effects of the "craving void", rather than an analysis of the "craving void" itself, as is the stanza. It is, however, the stanza that concerns us: and it is, quite simply, excellent. The 'hell' is presented in constricted and insipid terms: 'quiet', 'dwell', 'narrow being', 'rest', 'medium of desire'<sup>3</sup>, while, ironically, all the heat metaphors of 'fire', 'motion', 'quenchless', 'kindled' and 'fever', which would be associated more obviously with the idea of 'hell', belong to the energy of aspiration which struggles away from that 'hell'. Yet this energy is itself a different kind of 'hell'; for the aspiring spirit is seen as diseased ('a fever at the core'), and is compelled, like the addict, to seek the maximum intensity from life ('Preys upon high adventure', with the concomitant suggestion of a prey to 'high adventure'), until it finally destroys itself. So the fire imagery magnificently combines the idea of self-consuming energy: 'quenchless evermore' - it cannot be contained or tamed, it must burn itself out. The contrast between 'motion' and 'rest' is also splendidly captured by the structure and pointing of the stanza. The enjambment from the second to the fifth line, and from the seventh to the eighth line, reflects the refusal of energy to be contained; while the more heavily end-stopped 'Beyond the fitting medium of desire' is crucially placed in the middle of the stanza, and 'rest' (heavily emphasized and end-stopped at the caesura) in the middle of a line, which underscores their static nature.

1. LJ. III, 109.

2. Pope, Eloisa to Abelard, 94.

3. Cf. 'damned insipid medium'; final Journal entry, April 19, 1814, LJ. III, 257.

But the drive of the poetry continues over these relative stops and is only finally halted by the full-stop at the end of the stanza. Hence, the frame of the stanza can be seen as the prison out of which energy is struggling to escape; a finite form that is, ironically, containing an infinite striving. One further point is that the rhymes, none of which seems contrived, are peculiarly apt and expressive: 'hell'/'dwell', 'fire'/'aspire'/'desire'/'tire'; they emphasize precisely what the poetry is discussing.

The dire or even subversive influence of such restless spirits, is considered in the next stanza:

This makes the madmen who have made men mad  
By their contagion; Conquerors and Kings,  
Founders of sects and systems, to whom add  
Sophists, Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things  
Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,  
And are themselves the fools to those they fool;  
Envied, yet how unenviable! what stings  
Are theirs! One breast laid open were a school  
Which would unteach mankind the lust to shine or rule;

The point is that such 'madmen' infect others with a similarly restless desire, and thus a vicious circle is set up. This circle (aspiration generating similar aspiration), is neatly captured by the continued use of the disease image in 'contagion', 'mad', 'madmen', and by repetition: 'This makes the madmen who have made men mad', 'themselves the fools to those they fool', 'Envied, yet how unenviable'. In these stanzas Byron is indeed presenting us with 'One breast laid open' in order to teach the truth about ambition's 'stings', and to dissuade men from 'the lust to shine or rule'. And the contrast he draws is between what men imagine are the enviable lives of those in lofty positions, and what misery, in reality, those lives are. Significantly, he includes 'Bards' (besides men of action and pioneers): this not only establishes himself as a target of his own criticism, but it implies a denouncing of poetry for its harmful effects on the minds of men ('unquiet things' could very well

be a translation of 'genus irritabile'); harmful because, as we have seen in the first chapter, poets are 'mere dreamers' and do not speak the truth. We are also reminded of the many references Byron makes to poetry as a 'disease'.

While this stanza does not add much to the actual analysis of ambition, it does provide concrete examples of the types of 'madmen', which broadens the application of Byron's discussion. The next stanza proceeds to depict the element in which the ambitious thrive:

Their breath is agitation, and their life  
A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,  
And yet so nurs'd and bigotted to strife,  
That should their days, surviving perils past,  
Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast  
With sorrow and supineness, and so die;  
Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste  
With its own flickering, or a sword laid by  
Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously.

44

The word 'agitation' recalls the use of that word in the passage from Byron's letter to Annabella<sup>1</sup>, and reminds us, as does most of the stanza, of the ideas we have seen expressed already in stanza 42. But Byron here enlarges upon those ideas. He is more concerned with the end of the ambitious man's career, rather than the career itself. The two images represent the unavoidable alternative endings to such a career: the 'storm', and by implication the ship that rides it; and the 'twilight', which also by implication presupposes the sun and its journey through the day. And 'sink' links these two images splendidly, or perhaps rather transfers us from the one to the other. In the first case, the ship rides and sinks in the storm: that is, 'agitation' expends itself to its own limits (the energy of the career comes to a climactic and sudden end). In the second case, the sun shines for the day and, 'surviving perils past', sinks slowly into oblivion: that is, the ambitious man outlives his career, and wastes away ('Melt' is particularly forceful here, suggesting the dissolution of the day's former intensity - the 'storm'). The difference between these images and the ends they represent (the abrupt and the gradual, or

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1. LJ. III, 109.

to keep to the meteorological analogy, the eclipse and the waning) is magnificently reproduced in the structure of the stanza. The abrupt ending is given two lines; the gradual, four; and the climax of each ending is in itself a line-ending. Again, in the first, the crescendo of a 'storm whereon they ride' is instantly revoked by the bathetic 'to sink at last'. In the second, a drawn out diminuendo leads us through 'Melt', 'calm', 'twilight', 'overcast', 'sorrow and supineness' and completes itself when it reaches 'and so die'. Thus the self-destructiveness of ambition is suggested both by the images and by the self-destruction, so to speak, built into the actual structure of the line. The final three lines re-iterate the point by way of simile, though both the 'flame' and the 'sword' seem intended to emphasize the last metaphorical image of the setting sun. And indeed they do so, but they do so in different ways. The 'flame' (of energy)<sup>1</sup>, flickers itself away because it has nothing more to feed on; the 'sword', which is an instrument in the hands of another, 'eats into itself' because it is no longer used. Of course, both suggest the idea of redundancy; but 'runs to waste/With its own flickering' continues the sense of unbridled energy (to which the enjambent contributes), whereas the 'sword' 'rusts' because it feels itself contained, checked (the image is, surely, that of a sword in its sheath).<sup>2</sup> Having no further purpose, it turns to destroy itself. In this way the 'sword' image seems to embrace that of the 'flame', giving it at the same time a more definite occupation (i.e. war) and plausibly, returning us in thought to Napoleon. For he can be seen as the sword 'laid by' by 'the gods' as part of their 'jeu': so the image would, in a manner, confirm Byron's revised 'system of fatalism'.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Continuing the fire image of stanza 42.

2. Writing to Hobhouse in 1820, Byron remarks: 'Surely you agree with me about the real vacuum of human pursuits, but one must force an object of attainment - not to rust in the Scabbard altogether.' LJ. VII, 116.

3. LJ. III, 218.

We now come to the final stanza of this group, in which Byron summarizes in one forceful image, the moral to be drawn from the discussion of the preceding nine stanzas:

He who ascends to mountain-tops, shall find  
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;  
He who surpasses or subdues mankind,  
Must look down on the hate of those below.  
Though high above the sum of glory glow,  
And far beneath the earth and ocean spread,  
Round him are icy rocks, and loudly blow  
Contending tempests on his naked head,  
And thus reward the toils which to those summits led. 45.

This stanza has given rise to a lot of unnecessary criticism (mixed metaphors, difficulties as to points of comparison), but McGann effectively dismisses any such objections in his brief and very sensible note: 'The metaphor here has been said to be mixed, but if "peaks" is a metaphor not of great men but of their situation, then the figure is consistent.'<sup>1</sup> And, indeed, it is consistent.

The stanza emphasizes the utter isolation and the seclusion necessary to the man who in any way outshines his fellows. It is divided into two sentences. The first presents the argument through imagery, in the first two lines, and through statement, in the second two lines. The second sentence develops the argument in more detail by way of imagery again. The imagery, both visual and tactile, is important, giving the argument its coherence and the stanza its cohesion. To begin with, there is the visual image of the mountain which signifies the heights of ambition or power (as McGann rightly says, not 'great men but ... their situation'). But perhaps more crucially though, is the image of coldness that surrounds that position: the 'snow' (line 2) relates to the 'icy rocks' (line 7) and to the 'Contending tempests' (line 8), all of which serve to express the 'hate' of line 4. The point is then, that a great man is surrounded by those who are jealous or envious of him.<sup>2</sup> The use of 'clouds' is also appropriate, for it suggests that a great

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1. PW. II, 304.

2. Cf. Stanza 43, 'Envied, yet how unenviable'.

man is 'wrapt' in a mist of uncertainty - not as to himself, but as to whom of those nearest to him to trust. The implicit injunction being, as it is throughout the stanza, that he can trust no one - nor should he trust anyone but himself.<sup>1</sup> The image of the 'sun of glory' continues this idea; for, while it may 'glow', it remains nonetheless 'high above' and does not seem to give out any heat. And this suggests that a great man must himself generate his own heat in order to prevent the 'icy rocks' and 'snow' of 'hate' and envy from affecting him, or from coming too close to him: his heat (self-dependence) is his armour. Again, 'naked', in the penultimate line, stresses his isolation, vulnerability and necessary self-dependence; while 'Contending tempests' suggests not only that he is surrounded by those vying against him, but that those around him vie amongst themselves for his favour. And, in this last instance, the words 'loudly blow' might be seen as the flattery (the obsequious exhalations) he receives, or the petty squabbles going on around him which he has to put up with. Finally, just as the 'sun of glory' does not seem to give any assistance to a great man, nor do the 'earth and ocean' offer him any menace: for, the 'earth and ocean' signify the generality of mankind who are too far removed from him to disturb him. His greatest threat comes from those nearest to him.

This stanza is important, both in argument and imagery, in so far as it prepares us for the setting and for the situation of the hero of Manfred; and because, from this point onwards, Byron's mountains, or rather people or things on them or growing on them, become invested with the qualities he has here discussed.<sup>2</sup> They become indeed, metaphors for the independent and free individual, who has the ability to endure all alone.

Although Napoleon recurs frequently in Byron's poetry hereafter,<sup>3</sup> such passages add little that is new to what we have already followed, and nowhere

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1. Cf. stanzas 40 and 41.

2. E.g. the 'chiefless castles' of Childe Harold III, 47; or the 'tannen of Childe Harold IV, 20.

3. For instance, and more obviously, in Childe Harold IV, 89/92; The Age of Bronze, iii/v and xvii; and Don Juan IX, 9, X, 58/59, XI, 55/56, 77 and 83, and XIV, 89/90.

do we find the same serious concentration and depth of analysis as we have found here. Besides, although it is tempting to pursue them, they would distract us from the aim of this chapter, which has been to assess Byron's attitude to Napoleon and to establish what he learns from his chosen man of action. In this respect, the firm resolution of the above stanza seems to be the most suitable note on which to end our discussion.

But perhaps the final words ought to remain Byron's. In response to an article that had appeared in a Venetian newspaper, alleging that Napoleon was the 'protagonist' of Childe Harold III 'under a fictitious name'<sup>1</sup>, Byron wrote:

Buonaparte is not the protagonist of the poem under any name - & where he is mentioned it is openly, & by his own. ... It is true that he is treated of - in a part of the poem referring to the battle of Waterloo - as an historical personage; - & I have spoken of him ... as a man of great qualities & considerable defects; - but with the respect due to misfortune ... had he still been the Emperor of France & the enemy of my country - I should have either spoken of him differently or not at all. - I did not flatter him then - & that is probably a reason ... why I do not abuse him now ... It is said in this article - that Buonaparte is my Idol - & that I have written nothing on Lord Wellington; - the first is false - and the latter true, & neither of these circumstances is of any consequence. - - The conclusion that I 'surpass all the other admirers of Buonaparte' appears to me to be a 'non sequitur' ... are there none surviving of all who once were so? what is become of France & Italy - to say nothing of other nations of Europe? to conclude I beg leave to assure you that I am neither admirer nor vituperator of Buonaparte.<sup>2</sup>

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1. LJ. V, 201

2. April ? 1817; LJ. V. 202.



#### CHAPTER 4

##### MONOLOGUE, LAMENT, PROPHECY;

##### FROM MENTAL IMPRISONMENT TO POETRY AS ACTION

At the close of the preceding chapter, we found Byron defending the virtues of isolation and self-dependence, and extolling the ability of the individual to endure all alone. Indeed, these are the ostensible reasons for which the Childe of Canto III (quite unlike the Childe of Canto I, who, having 'felt the fulness of satiety',<sup>1</sup> and having run 'through Sin's long labyrinth',<sup>2</sup> 'departed from his father's hall',<sup>3</sup>) chooses self-exile:

But soon he knew himself the most unfit  
Of men to herd with Man; with whom he held  
Little in common; untaught to submit  
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quell'd  
In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompell'd,  
He would not yield dominion of his mind  
To spirits against whom his own rebell'd;  
Proud though in desolation; which could find  
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.

12

There is maturity of both self-knowledge ('he knew himself') and self-criticism here. The arrogant assertion of individualism throughout the stanza, but particularly in lines 6/9, is qualified by 'untaught' in the third line, and 'still uncompell'd' in the fifth. While McGann, very justly, refers us to Manfred, II, ii, 50/72,<sup>4</sup> far more important is the allusion to Milton's Satan in, specifically, Book I of Paradise Lost. and the implications that arise therefrom. For Byron too, like Satan and like his hero Napoleon, had had his 'fall'; and his refusal to 'submit' or to 'yield' his mind, and his remaining 'Proud though in desolation' (a highly Miltonic phrase), echo Satan's first colloquy with Beelzebub:

- 
1. CHP. I. 4.
  2. CHP. I. 5.
  3. CHP. I. 7.
  4. PW. II, 301; but see also Manfred, III, iv, 129/132.

What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost: the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield ...

105/108

And his later exclamation:

Farewell happy fields  
Where joy for ever dwells; hail, horrors, hail  
Infernal world; and thou, profoundest Hell,  
Receive thy new possessor, one who brings  
A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.  
What matter where, if I be still the same ...

249/256

'... Here at least/We shall be free' (258/259). But, such freedom is not to be bought so easily. Byron's mind may indeed 'find/A life within itself', yet that life turns out to be the 'Hell' of 'mental torture',<sup>1</sup> rather than a 'Heaven'. So that his proud assertion of individualism proves no freedom whatsoever, but effectively condemns him to self-imprisonment. For, 'not [to] yield' is to remain trapped in self, unable to resist 'the Mind's canker in its savage mood',<sup>2</sup> and least of all able to follow Byron's own admonition that 'the heart must/Leap kindly back to kindness, though disgust/Hath wean'd it from all worldlings'.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter then, we shall consider those poems that deal either implicitly or explicitly with the theme of imprisonment, in order to see how Byron overcomes such 'mental torture' and self-imprisonment, and to trace his development from the wholly subjective and isolated stance which we can see in the above stanza, towards the more mediatory role of the poet as 'prophet' where the mind looks out beyond itself. The principal poems we shall discuss are The Prisoner of Chillon (June/July 1816), The Lament of Tasso (April 1817), and The Prophecy of Dante (June 1819).

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1. LJ. V, 95.
  2. The Lament of Tasso, line 5.
  3. Childe Harold III, 53, 4/6.

The Prisoner of Chillon

In late June 1816, Byron and Shelley went on a sailing tour around Lake Lemán visiting places connected with Rousseau and his La Nouvelle Héloïse, and also the Castle of Chillon. The results of this were further additions to Childe Harold III, and the poem with which we shall now be concerned, The Prisoner of Chillon.

According to Coleridge,<sup>1</sup> this was probably written during the two days immediately following the visit to Chillon (June 26) when the two poets were detained at Ouchy (June 27/29). At all events, he says, it was completed by July 10, and was published in December 1816.

In his 'Advertisement' to the poem, Byron admits that 'When this poem was composed, I was not sufficiently aware of the history of Bonnivard, or I should have endeavoured to dignify the subject by an attempt to celebrate his courage and his virtues.'<sup>2</sup> He then subjoins a brief account in French of Bonnivard's life, which had been supplied to him since by an acquaintance. Certainly many of the details as shown in this account would have appealed to Byron: Bonnivard's heroism, erudition, energy ('force de son âme'), and his dedication to the cause of liberty. But, at the time of composing the poem, Byron's only source of information seems to have been what he had heard from the guide at Chillon; and he, according to the Alpine Journal, 'was as drunk as Blucher'.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this accounts for some of the discrepancies between fact and fiction in the poem; but most probably, and more significantly, it does not. For, who Bonnivard really was, what were his circumstances, and why he was imprisoned, are hardly related in the poem, nor are they material to it.<sup>4</sup> As Scott was the first to point out in his review,<sup>5</sup>

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1. Poetry, IV, 3.

2. Poetry, IV, 9.

3. LJ, V, 98.

4. Compare Shelley's immediate reaction to the visit: 'I never saw such a monument more terrible of that cold and inhuman tyranny, which it had been the delight of man to exercise over man.' (To Thomas Love Peacock, July 12, 1816, The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Newly edited by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 Vols. (London, 1965), Vol. IX, p. 174.

5. Quarterly Review, Vol. XVI, (October 1816), pp. 172/208.

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But it has not been the purpose of Lord Byron to paint the peculiar character of Bonnivard, nor do we find any thing to remind us of the steady firmness and patient endurance of one suffering for conscience-sake. The object of the poem ... is to consider captivity in the abstract, and to mark its effects in gradually chilling the mental powers as it benumbs and freezes the animal frame, until the unfortunate victim becomes, as it were, a part of his dungeon, and identified with his chains.<sup>1</sup>

This is very fair and astute. Indeed, the whole review is a most gallant and generous tribute to Byron, particularly at such a time, which Byron himself was the first to acknowledge <sup>with comparable</sup> generosity.<sup>2</sup> But, while the poem may be 'more powerful than pleasing',<sup>3</sup> the negative conclusion to which Scott comes, that it 'is the more disagreeable as affording human hope no anchor to rest upon',<sup>4</sup> is not entirely satisfactory. Certainly Byron is considering 'captivity in the abstract' and the picture which he paints in the poem, as in those connected with it, is grim indeed. Yet, as I hope to show, by the end of the poem a positive reconciliation has taken place: Bonnivard has come to terms not only with his prison, as Scott so rightly points out,<sup>5</sup> but with the prison which is himself.

The opening lines of the prefatory 'Sonnet on Chillon' indicate the character of the poem which is to follow:

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind:  
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art:  
For there thy habitation is the heart -  
The heart which love of thee alone can bind ...

1/4

The paradox of 'Brightest in dungeons' immediately creates a tension between temporal, spatial and physical confinement, and the extemporal, infinite capacity of 'Mind' which constitutes true freedom. The idea is similar to

- 
1. Ibid., p. 200.
  2. LJ. V, 178 and 185.
  3. Quarterly Review, Vol. XVI (October 1816), p. 203.
  4. Ibid., p. 203.
  5. Ibid., p. 203.

Lovelace's 'Stone walls do not a prison make, /Nor iron bars a cage;/ Minds innocent and quiet take /That for an hermitage';<sup>1</sup> but it goes further than this. The 'Eternal Spirit' is 'brightest' in a dungeon, because there 'Liberty' can be experienced (loved) in its purest (Ideal) form. The more the body is restricted, the more palpably the 'Mind' is made aware of its own limitlessness and the more the love of that 'Liberty' can be proved - that 'love' which is bondage and yet freedom, as in service to God (this is not a chimerical equation, as will become apparent during our discussion). Thus the experience of true freedom may be seen as relating in inverse ratio to the degree of physical or material constraint. In other words, 'Liberty' is the transcendence of the unfettered 'Mind' over external restraints. But, in order to achieve such transcendence at all, the mind itself must first be unfettered; it must become, to use Lovelace's words, 'innocent and quiet', at peace with itself. And this is how I wish to interpret The Prisoner of Chillon: as the mind coming to terms with itself. For, at the outset of the poem, we are not presented with the conviction expressed in the sonnet; the poem is a progression towards that conviction, a record of the process of the mind freeing itself from its own imprisonment.

As has been said in the introduction, there is no desire here to discredit the arguments put forward by other critics who have dealt with this poem; there is, rather, merely the wish to supplement them, to offer a plausible additional argument. But this argument should be seen as part of a continuing one, which is tracing a specific development in Byron's thought and career, and of which the sequence of poems considered in this chapter form a whole.

The poem is written in the form of a monologue. Not only does this reduce the distinction between the poetic voice of Byron and that of the persona he has assumed, but it also serves to remind us constantly of the

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isolation of the figure speaking. The opening passage underlines Bonnivard's solitary condition, whilst drawing attention to his mental torture and to the more symbolic aspects of his prison:

My hair is grey, but not with years,  
Nor grew it white  
In a single night,  
As men's have grown from sudden fears;  
My limbs are bowed, though not with toil,  
But rusted with a vile repose,  
For they have been a dungeon's spoil,  
And mine has been the fate of those  
To whom the goodly earth and air  
Are banned, and barred - forbidden fare;  
But this was for my father's faith  
I suffered chains and courted death;  
That father perished at the stake  
For tenets he would not forsake;  
And for the same his lineal race  
In darkness found a dwelling place;  
We were seven - who now are one,  
Six in youth, and one in age,  
Finished as they had begun,  
Proud of Persecution's rage;  
One in fire, and two in field,  
Their belief with blood have sealed,  
Dying as their father died,  
For the God their foes denied; -  
Three were in a dungeon cast,  
Of whom this wreck is left the last.

1/26


This passage has been cited in full because of what seem to be significant historical inaccuracies, and other details which indicate that Byron has superimposed himself upon the figure of Bonnivard.

To the first four lines Byron has appended a note to the effect that 'Grief is said to have the same effect' as fear in suddenly turning the hair white. That the whole picture of decrepitude here is attributable to grief rather than to physical imprisonment, is further supported by an earlier MS reading of line 6: 'But with the inward waste of grief'.<sup>1</sup> Such emphasis, together with the sense of isolation which accumulates throughout the passage and is firmly established in the final couplet, suggests most strongly that the prison depicted is not so much a prison in a literal sense, but in a

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1. Poetry. IV, 13.



figurative one: a prison of self. And the historical inaccuracies seem to lend weight to this idea. For, Bonnivard was not imprisoned, as is here suggested, for his religious beliefs or for cherishing his 'father's faith' (he was a staunch supporter of the Reformation), but for his declared opposition to the alien rule of the Duc de Savoye. He had announced himself the defender ('le défenseur') of the Genevese republic, and it was the Duc who had had him imprisoned. Nor did Bonnivard have seven brothers; he had two, neither of whom was imprisoned with him. But, concerning the seven brothers, Coleridge<sup>1</sup> refers us to Elze's note in his biography of Byron,<sup>2</sup> which draws attention to the epitaph in Hucknall Torkard Church of Richard, Lord Byron who was one of seven brothers. This significantly strengthens the suggestion that Byron is or those concerning his own ancestry borrowing rather more from biographical facts , than from the historical facts of Bonnivard's life and imprisonment.

This is perhaps obvious enough, and it will not be exploited further than to pave the way for attempting to answer what seems to me to be the crucial question, although it does not appear to have troubled other critics unduly. Why does Byron introduce two brothers into Bonnivard's prison? And why, if it is only to emphasize Bonnivard's isolation after they have died (as indeed it does do too), does Byron take such pains to depict their different characters and the different manner of their deaths? The issue might seem an unnecessary one to pursue were it not that Byron devotes at least four major passages to them (iv, v, vii, viii), and that the death of the younger one in particular has a peculiarly traumatic effect on Bonnivard.

Without wishing to pre-empt the argument, I am going to suggest that the brothers are figurative extensions of the central persona (Bonnivard); and, taking this a step further, that they represent poetically certain aspects of

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1. Poetry. IV, 14.

2. Karl Elze, Lord Byron. A Biography (London, 1872), p. 4, note 1.

Bonnivard's life or character which he must acknowledge as being past recall and has to learn to live without.

Being 'the eldest of the three' (69), Bonnivard feels it his duty 'to uphold and cheer the rest' (70); but he feels particularly protective towards his youngest brother:

The youngest, whom my father loved,  
Because our mother's brow was given  
To him, with eyes as blue as heaven -  
For him my soul was sorely moved;  
And truly might it be distressed  
To see such bird in such a nest;  
For he was beautiful as day -  
(When day was beautiful to me  
As to young eagles, being free) -  
A polar day, which will not see  
A sunset till its summer's gone,  
Its sleepless summer of long light,  
The snow-clad offspring of the sun;  
And thus he was as pure and bright,  
And in his natural spirit gay,  
With tears for nought but others' ills,  
And then they flowed like mountain rills,  
Unless he could assuage the woe  
Which he abhorred to view below.

73/91

This is an extraordinarily tender description, yet it is hardly that of a 'real' or material being. The presence of Rousseau, Chateaubriand or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre is unmistakable here, in so far as the whole characterization is that of a child of nature. And this is a new departure for Byron: for we cannot look back at his earlier poetry for such an ethereal description (unless it be to that of a woman),<sup>1</sup> but we can look forward to the Torquil/Neuha relationship in The Island, and to the Juan/Haidee episode in Don Juan III. For, the natural innocence, beauty and purity which is so vividly conveyed here through the extended image of the 'polar day' and other images drawn from nature ('bird', 'mountain rills'), suggest that the picture presented is one both of idealized youth and of woman. The youth is described in feminine terms with regard both to his looks and to his spirit: his vulnerability suggested by 'bird', and his sensitivity demonstrable in 'tears for nought but

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1. Zuleika, for instance, in The Bride of Abydos, I. vi.

others' ills'. Thus there seems to be a conflation in this passage of youth, woman and the spirit of nature. That he is likened to a 'bird' will have significant repercussions later on.

The other brother presents a contrast:

The other was as pure of mind,  
But formed to combat with his kind;  
Strong in his frame, and of a mood  
Which 'gainst the world in war had stood,  
And perished in the foremost rank  
With joy; - but not in chains to pine;  
His spirit withered with their clank,  
I saw it silently decline -  
And so perchance in sooth did mine;  
But yet I forced it on to cheer  
Those relics of a home so dear.  
He was a hunter of the hills,  
Had followed there the deer and wolf;  
To him this dungeon was a gulf,  
And fettered feet the worst of ills.

92/106

Unlike the spiritualized figure of his youngest brother, we have here the masculine figure of the man of action, full of the qualities of energy and ambition. And noticeably, Byron does not resort to imagery in order to describe him, but chooses the strong and concrete terms appropriate to his character: the potential soldier (notice the conditional 'had stood' of line 95), and the 'hunter of the hills' (italics added). The figure will remind us of those discussed in the final pages of the preceding chapter: the 'quick bosoms' to whom 'quiet' is 'a hell'.<sup>1</sup> So will the manner of his death. He 'pined', 'his mighty heart declined', and he lost all appetite (literally) for living, because his 'soul' -

was of that mould  
Which in a palace had grown cold,  
Had his free breathing been denied  
The ranges of the steep mountain's side;  
But why delay the truth? - he died.

140/144

This is the fate of the active man deprived of his active element (notice the re-iteration of 'hills' in 'mountain's side', whose natural freedom and 'range' is splendidly contrasted with the luxurious but artificial and confined 'palace').

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1. CHP. III, 42.

Again this recalls those who, 'surviving perils passed', 'feel overcast/with sorrow and supineness, and so die' as well as the final 'sword' image of that stanza.<sup>1</sup> It also reminds us that Bonnivard's limbs too 'have rusted with a vile repose' (line 6, italics added). The relative terse brevity with which the death of this brother is recorded, not only reflects the blunt practicality of his active spirit, but also contrasts strongly with the drawn-out description of the youngest brother's death:

But he, the favourite and the flower,  
Most cherished since his natal hour,  
His mother's image in fair face,  
The infant love of all his race,  
His martyred father's dearest thought,  
My latest care, for whom I sought  
To hoard my life, that his might be  
Less wretched now, and one day free;  
He, too, who yet had held untired  
A spirit natural or inspired -  
He, too, was struck, and day by day  
Was withered on the stalk away. ...  
He faded, and so calm and meek,  
So softly worn, so sweetly weak,  
So tearless, yet so tender - kind,  
And grieved for those he left behind;  
With all the while a cheek whose bloom  
Was as a mockery of the tomb,  
Whose tints as gently sunk away  
As a departing rainbow's ray;  
An eye of most transparent light,  
That almost made the dungeon bright;  
And not a word of murmur - not  
A groan o'er his untimely lot, -  
A little talk of better days,  
A little hope my own to raise,  
For I was sunk in silence - lost  
In this last loss, of all the most;  
And then the sighs he would suppress  
Of fainting Nature's feebleness,  
More slowly drawn, grew less and less ...

164/175, 186/204

This is consistent with his character as previously depicted (lines 73/91). The re-iteration of his bearing their 'mother's image', and the way in which he 'faded' ('So calm and meek', 'softly worn', 'sweetly weak', 'tender'), emphasize his femininity; while all the natural imagery (the flower, 'rainbow' and light), again seems to affirm that he is a child of nature, and suggests that

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1. CHP. III, 44.

his death is hardly that of a physical being but rather the transfiguration of a spiritual one.

When the older brother died, Bonnivard 'strove, but strove in vain,/To rend and gnash my bonds in twain' (147/148). Significantly, when the younger brother dies:

I burst my chain with one strong bound,  
And rushed to him: - I found him not,  
I only stirred in this black spot,  
I only lived, I only drew  
The accursed breath of dungeon-dew;  
The last, the sole, the dearest link  
Between me and the eternal brink,  
Which bound me to my failing race,  
Was broken in this fatal place.

210/218

It seems then that Bonnivard's inability to break his chain after his first brother's death was because he still had his second brother to depend upon. He bursts his chain now, because his youngest brother was the last 'link' that 'bound' him to his 'failing race': that is he represented the last refuge that Bonnivard had from having to face up to his absolute isolation. Bonnivard was 'wild with fear' (206) and full of 'dread' (207) at the prospects of this last brother's death, not so much because of that death itself, but because it would compel him to recognize his isolation. And the awareness that he is utterly alone is forced upon him and us by the use of emphasis in 'I', 'I', 'I' (212/213). What emerges from this therefore seems to be the suggestion that the brothers are, in effect, obstacles to Bonnivard's necessary self-dependence. They are a 'solace' (56) to him, and each is a 'comforter' (58) providing him with 'some new hope' (60); but until they have died to him, he will continue to depend on their support and never learn to come to terms with his prison which, to repeat, is the prison of self.

To be more explicit, if, as has been argued, the younger brother epitomizes the more spiritual aspects of life as well as nature, youth and those associated with youth, male or female; and if the older brother embodies the

more practical and masculine virtues of energy and action, - then together they seem to represent past ties from which Bonnivard must ruthlessly sever himself in order to build upon his essential self. This is the poetic point; but Byron does not pretend that the task is an easy one, as the remainder of the poem bears out.

Faced with the loss of all spiritual, social and familial ties, the initial impact of Bonnivard's sense of isolation annihilates him:

First came the loss of light, and air,  
And then of darkness too;  
I had no thought, no feeling - none -  
Among the stones I stood a stone,  
And was, scarce conscious what I wist,  
As shrubless crags within the mist;  
For all was blank, and bleak, and grey;  
It was not night - it was not day;  
It was not even the dungeon-light,  
So hateful to my heavy sight,  
But vacancy absorbing space,  
And fixedness - without a place;  
There were no stars - no earth - no time -  
But silence, and a stirless breath  
Which neither was of life nor death;  
A sea of stagnant idleness,  
Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless:

233/250

Despite some infelicitous lines and rhymes here, this exactly parallels, and perhaps more powerfully owing to its concision, the horrific vacuity and evocation of absence which we find in the poem 'Darkness' (July 1816) - though there the vision is one of universal blankness. Here, the descent into nothingness and the vision there experienced (captured with particular forcefulness in the final seven lines), convey in the grimmest terms the necessary spiritual 'death' Bonnivard must undergo, in order to re-emerge as a self-dependent ego.

This passage represents the nadir of Bonnivard's emotional and spiritual paralysis, and it is here that he becomes, in Scott's words, 'as it were, part of his dungeon'.<sup>1</sup> For, as we can see, 'Among the stones' he 'stood a stone' (236), without 'thought' or 'feeling' (235). But, from this point onwards in

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1. Quarterly Review, XVI, (October 1816), p. 200.

the poem, there is a gradual, if very tentative at first, breaking away from such static identification and an effort towards self-renewal. This is initiated by the 'carol of a bird':

A light broke in upon my brain, -  
It was the carol of a bird;  
It ceased, and then it came again,  
The sweetest song ear ever heard,  
And mine was thankful till my eyes  
Ran over with the glad surprise,  
And they that moment could not see  
I was the mate of misery ...

251/258

The light, the song and the emotion it induces, contrast strongly with the 'darkness' (234), 'silence' (247) and absence of 'feeling' (235) in the preceding passage. Clearly, just as that earlier passage represented a spiritual 'death', the passage here represents a spiritual awakening. Notice that the 'light' breaks in upon Bonnivard's 'brain', and that it comes in the form of a song. This suggests the spiritual enlightenment, the emotional reaction to which releases him from his former 'death': he is 'thankful', and his tears are those of 'glad surprise'. It is only when his eyes clear that he recognizes his prison again; and when he does so, there is a difference:

But then by dull degrees came back  
My senses to their wonted track;  
I saw the dungeon walls and floor  
Close slowly round me as before,  
I saw the glimmer of the sun  
Creeping as it before had done,  
But through the crevice where it came  
That bird was perched, as fond and tame,  
And tamer than upon a tree ...

259/267

The first six lines here seek to emphasize that his literal situation has not changed. He sees his dungeon and the 'glimmer' of the sun as he did before; the re-iterated 'I saw' and 'before' stress that the prison has not altered physically. Yet, the 'But', at the opening of the seventh line, is unequivocally emphatic, and undermines and qualifies the preceding six lines. For, what he actually sees is now coloured by the presence of the bird, or rather, by the element of which this bird is the symbol or emblem, and by his renewed



emotional response. Poetically, this bird is idealized and is obviously more than a mere bird: it is unique (271/272), sings the 'sweetest song' (254) that says 'a thousand things' (269) and seems 'to say them all for' Bonnivard. This is highly suggestive, and Bonnivard himself does not know exactly who or what the bird is. He chooses to think that 'it was come to love' him (275), that it was a 'visitant from Paradise' (284) and the spirit of his brother come to comfort him (288). (Clearly this brother would be the younger one who was earlier likened to a bird.<sup>1</sup>) But such comfort is not to be gained from resurrecting the past or from Bonnivard's pretending that he is not alone in his isolation. The bird proves to be a bird, 'mortal' as Bonnivard acknowledges when it flies away and leaves him 'doubly lone' (292). Nonetheless, poetically the bird is an important symbol. For, it has brought Bonnivard back 'to feel and think' (278), and the first thing he does is to feel sympathy for the bird, compassion and love (273/284). Hence it has awoken him from his passive torpor and restored him to a sense of humanity, which is immediately reflected in his relations with his 'keepers'. For they 'grew compassionate' (301) and did not refasten his chains (304/305), which suggests that in his new spiritual condition Bonnivard invites the sympathy of others. His attitude becomes positive and active: he finds it 'liberty to stride' (306) up and down the prison; that is, he makes what freedom he can out of his situation. And this liberty is only sullied if 'with headless tread' (314) he steps on the graves of his brothers (significantly buried in his cell). If he does so, his 'breath came gaspingly and thick,' and his 'crushed heart felt blind and sick.' (316/317). Such an exaggerated reaction suggests that the graves seem to represent the buried memories of the past which he resuscitates by treading on them, and so crushes his heart even more. (Notice 'crushed': it is as if

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1. For such similar transmigration, cf. The Bride of Abydos, II, xxviii, where Selim is transformed into a nightingale and Zuleika into a rose. See also, The Island, II, xv.

he is stepping on his own heart if he steps on their graves). There is perhaps also the suggestion that by stepping on the graves, he dishonours his newly acquired sympathy and thoughtfulness for others. (All this might seem somewhat specious were it not that Bonnivard delights in treading 'every part' (309) of his cell, though studiously 'Avoiding only' (312) his brothers' graves. Of course, this can be seen as the natural respect that is normally accorded the graves of the dead. But in the light of the present argument and the representational aspect of the brothers, the foregoing points seem consistent and plausible enough).

The next passage continues this theme, while raising certain issues which have a direct bearing upon the conclusion of the poem:

I made a footing in the wall,  
It was not therefrom to escape,  
For I had buried one and all,  
Who loved me in a human shape;  
And the whole earth would henceforth be  
A wider prison unto me;  
No child - no sire - no kin had I,  
No partner in my misery;  
I thought of this, and I was glad,  
For thought of them had made me mad;  
But I was curious to ascend  
To my barred windows, and to bend  
Once more, upon the mountains high,  
The quiet of a loving eye.

317/331

In the same way as Bonnivard would not have wished captivity on the bird (281/282), so is he here relieved that no other shares his fate. But the interesting question that arises from this passage is why indeed he has not attempted to escape before, nor wishes to do so now. He himself provides the reason, from which we can deduce the answer. Having 'buried one and all' (320) that 'bound' him to his 'failing race' (217), he would merely find 'the whole earth' a 'wider prison' (322/323). Hence, it is immaterial whether he is in or out of prison (which point looks forward to the concluding passage); for the 'prison' is himself from which there is no physical escape. But there are more comforting alternatives, which have been posited earlier in Childe Harold III:

Away with these! true Wisdom's world will be  
Within its own creation, or in thine,  
Maternal Nature! ...

46

The alternative here is between Nature and Mind (including poetry).  
The first of these is explored here. Bonnivard's curiosity 'to bend/Once  
more, upon the mountains high, /The quiet of a loving eye' represents an active  
effort to engage with Nature. Looking out of his prison, he sees Nature in all  
its ideal activity and vitality and, unlike himself, changelessness. But most  
significantly of all, he notices a little island:

And then there was a little isle,  
Which in my very face did smile,  
The only one in view;  
A small green isle, it seemed no more,  
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,  
But in it there were three tall trees,  
And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,  
And by it there were waters flowing,  
And on it there were young flowers growing,  
Of gentle breath and hue.

341/350

Unmistakeably this island parallels Bonnivard's prison: it is no bigger than  
his 'dungeon floor', and the 'three tall trees' reflect himself and his two  
brothers. Gleckner sees this island as a 'parody' of Bonnivard's 'death in  
life, of his universe of three graves'.<sup>1</sup> This is true, though in the present  
context this island also seems to represent the ideal state where the three  
brothers (i.e. the three portions of Bonnivard) are united imaginatively in  
fertile freedom, living together in harmony with themselves and the world about  
them. But this is denied Bonnivard. He sees an eagle which, as the emblem  
of aspiration, freedom and isolation, clearly parodies his own situation. And  
so he descends to his dungeon again, the 'darkness' of which falls on him 'as a  
heavy load' (360/361). Yet the subsequent four lines seem to offer some form  
of relief:

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1. Byron and the Ruins of Paradise. Robert F. Gleckner (Baltimore, 1967),  
p. 198.

It was as is a new-dug grave,  
Closing o'er one we sought to save, -  
And yet my glance, too much opprest,  
Had almost need of such a rest.

362/365

The first couplet here seems in some degree to be qualified by the second. It is as if he looked out on Nature to find consolation which she failed to provide. She could not 'save' Bonnivard, and so he suffers, as it were, a second 'death'. But this second 'death' has nothing of the absolute annihilation we witnessed earlier after his younger brother died (233/250). It merely confirms him in his prison of self, which it is almost a relief to return to. His 'glance' is 'too much opprest' because the harmony of Nature from which he is cut off, has only reminded him of his past and his thwarted hopes (hence the idealized fertility of the scene at which he looks, and particularly the existence of 'mountains high' and the eagle in his view), and made more palpable his sense of isolation. It is this blatant reminder from which he needs 'such a rest'.

So, where Bonnivard has looked out of his cell with the Wordsworthian hope of regarding Nature with the 'quiet of a loving eye'<sup>1</sup>, his experience closely parallels that of Coleridge recorded in Dejection: An Ode. But, by far the most appropriate and significant commentary here is the concluding passage from Byron's Alpine Journal:<sup>2</sup>

I am a lover of Nature - and an Admirer of Beauty - I can bear fatigue - & welcome privation - and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. - But in all this - the recollections of bitterness - & more especially of recent & more home desolation - which must accompany me through life - have preyed upon me here - and neither the music of the Shepherd - the crashing of the Avalanche - nor the torrent - the mountain - the Glacier - the Forest - nor the Cloud - have for one moment - lightened the weight upon my heart - nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty & the power and the Glory - around - above - & beneath me.

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1. Cf. 'with an eye made quiet by the power/ Of harmony, and the deep power of joy', Tintern Abbey, 47/48; though Coleridge refers us to A Poet's Epitaph. 'The harvest of a quiet eye' / Poetry, IV, 26n/.
  2. LJ. V, 104/105.

However, if Nature can provide no consolation, no release to the Mind, the Mind must turn to its only alternative, which is itself, and seek to reconcile itself to itself. In the words of Manfred:<sup>1</sup>

What I have done is done; I bear within  
A torture which could nothing gain from thine;  
The Mind which is immortal makes itself  
Requital for its good or evil thoughts, -  
Is its own origin of ill and end -  
And its own place and time; its innate sense,  
When stripped of this mortality, derives  
No colour from the fleeting things without,  
But is absorbed in suffrance or in joy,  
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.

127/136

It is to this position that Bonnivard comes in the final passage of The Prisoner of Chillon. After an indefinite period, 'men' came to set him free; he 'asked not why, and recked not where' because it was all the same to him whether he was 'Fettered or fetterless': he 'had learned to love despair' (370/374):

These heavy walls to me had grown  
A hermitage - and all my own;  
And half I felt as they were come  
To tear me from a second home;  
With spiders I had friendship made,  
And watched them in their sullen trade,  
Had seen the mice by moonlight play,  
And why should I feel less than they?  
We were all inmates of one place,  
And I, the monarch of each race,  
Had power to kill - yet, strange to tell!  
In quiet we had learned to dwell;  
My very chains and I grew friends,  
So much a long communion tends  
To make us what we are: - even I  
Regained my freedom with a sigh.

377/392

The whole essence of this passage is one of harmony. The emphasis is not on Bonnivard's having become 'a part of his dungeon, and identified with his chains', as Scott has it,<sup>2</sup> but rather on his having become reconciled to his dungeon and chains, which is not the same thing. Besides, strictly speaking and as he has already told us in part xi of the poem (304/305), he is not in 'chains': they are merely part of the furniture of the dungeon (symbolic

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1. Manfred, III, iv.

2. Quarterly Review, Vol. XVI (October 1816), p. 200.

nonetheless) with which he grows to be 'friends'. And, in the same way, he makes 'friendship' with the most insignificant creatures of his dungeon, which, though he has the 'power to kill', he has learnt to 'dwell' with in 'quiet'. (In terms of the present argument, these creatures can be seen as the creatures of his own mind - in much the same way as Bonnivard's brothers represent aspects of himself). Indeed, by drawing attention to himself as 'monarch' and to his unused capacity to 'kill', Bonnivard underlines the peace with which the 'in-mates' cohabit the dungeon and the mental self-possession he has achieved.. He has no need, no wish and no urge to 'kill' because he is at one with himself. His dungeon is a 'hermitage' and 'all' his 'own' (italics added); it is a 'second home' in which actual physical freedom plays no part.<sup>1</sup> Hence, Bonnivard tells us, he 'Regained' his 'freedom' with a 'sigh'. The 'sigh' is not that of sadness, nor altogether that of regret; it is the 'sigh' of indifference. For, the 'freedom' he is offered here is merely physical freedom in that world which, as he has previously told us, will always be a 'wider prison' to him (323). The point being that he will be in 'prison' (physically) wherever he goes, for life itself is the prison. The important thing is not to escape that prison (which would involve either mental oblivion or death), but to come to terms with, and to fortify the mind which can so transcend that prison.<sup>2</sup>

And this returns us to the prefatory sonnet, which has surely demanded the way in which the poem should be read: 'Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind:/ Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art' (italics added). The 'chainless Mind' has transcended its physical limitations, and Bonnivard is,

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1. Interestingly enough, this seems to be Byron's first use of a confined space as an image of freedom, the irony of which lends itself to the present point: that mental, not physical, freedom of the individual is the issue of the poem. Cf. The Island, I, ii, 41: 'The Freedom which can call each grot a home'.
  2. The position of Manfred is apparent here: first he seeks 'Oblivion - self-oblivion!' Then attempts suicide before he recognizes the supremacy of the self-responsible, self-reconciled mind. See Manfred, I, i and ii, and III, iv, 127/136.

in fact, more content to remain within the security and strength of the individual mind than to engage with the physical 'freedom' of the outside world now open to him.

Bonnivard has told us his story, naturally enough, in the past tense; but the first and second passages of the poem are delivered in a mixture of past and present tenses. The 'freedom' which he regains in the final line above (392), is the 'new day' of line 41 of the poem. And 'this new day' (41) is in turn the life in the outside world into which he has now been thrown. As he says, the 'marks' of his chains will not 'wear away' until that 'day' is 'done' (40/41): that is, he will bear the 'marks' of his grief (not, be it noted, the actual chains of his grief) throughout his life. This is fair enough, and is consistent with the position to which he comes, and on which the poem ends, in the final passage. But the suggestion arising from this is that Bonnivard, having come to terms with himself, must confront real life again; he must engage with the physical 'freedom' of the outside world despite the fact that it is merely a 'wider prison'.

The Prisoner of Chillon, therefore, seems to leave us with two questions that remain to be answered. Firstly, just how did Bonnivard's dungeon become a 'hermitage' and a 'second home' to him; how did his mind become reconciled to itself? And secondly, how does such a mind bear itself in the context of the 'wider prison' of life; how successfully can the enlightened mind re-engage with life? These are themes which Byron continues to explore in the next poem we shall consider, The Lament of Tasso.

#### The Lament of Tasso.

The Lament of Tasso was written in April 1817, after Byron had visited Ferrara, at the court of which Tasso had spent many years under the patronage of Leonora d'Este, and in whose Hospital of Saint' Anna he had been confined for lunacy by Alphonso II d'Este (the brother of Leonora). As with The Prisoner of Chillon, Byron does not so much exploit the possible ideas of

tyrannical injustice here, but again develops the theme of imprisonment. And again, he takes certain liberties with the facts. Chief amongst these is that of embroidering the apocryphal story of Tasso's love for Leonora, the discovery of which being the reason that led to his imprisonment. Nor, as we shall find Byron suggesting, did Tasso write his Gerusalemme Liberata while he was in prison (1579/1586), but several years before (the first unauthorized edition appeared in 1576). However, such departures from historical accuracy will again be found to be significant.

As far as the poetry is concerned, Byron thought rather highly of the poem: "'these be good rhymes'", he wrote to Murray, demanding for it the same figure as he had set upon Manfred.<sup>1</sup> Bernard Blackstone<sup>2</sup> has commented very thoroughly on this aspect of the poem, and it is not the principal intention to study it here. The aim is to concentrate on the idea of imprisonment and the issues that it raises in the poem.

Although the poem is written again in the form of a monologue, it distinguishes itself from The Prisoner of Chillon in so far as it is explicitly addressed to a particular person, Leonora. This suggests that we should consider the poem as a verse-epistle; as a complaint, a lament to a specific audience which we, as it were, overhear. This has two notable consequences: it makes us more aware that the poem is a poetical effusion (that is, that Tasso is using poetry as a vehicle of communication); and, since the poem's audience (Leonora) is silent, its plea becomes all the more urgent to us (as readers), making us curiously more aware of the agony and isolation of the persona, than did the persona's monologue in The Prisoner of Chillon.

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1. LJ. V, 219.

2. Byron: A Survey (London: Longman, 1975), pp. 170/174.



Long years! - It tries the thrilling frame to bear  
And eagle-spirit of a Child of Song -  
Long years of outrage - calumny - and wrong;  
Imputed madness, prisoned solitude,  
And the Mind's canker in its savage mood,  
When the impatient thirst of light and air  
Parches the heart; and the abhorred grate,  
Marring the sunbeams with its hideous shade,  
Works through the throbbing eyeball to the brain,  
With a hot sense of heaviness and pain;  
And bare, at once, Captivity displayed  
Stands scoffing through the never-opened gate,  
Which nothing through its bars admits, save day,  
And tasteless food, which I have eat alone  
Till its unsocial bitterness is gone;  
And I can banquet like a beast of prey,  
Sullen and lonely, couching in the cave  
Which is my lair, and - it may be - my grave.

1/18

As the word 'tries' suggests, Tasso's imprisonment is a test of his physical and spiritual endurance; and certainly his physical condition has taken its mental toll. The whole of his 'Captivity' is presented in unnatural terms: the desire for the outside world of 'light and air' 'Parches the heart'; the 'sunbeams' are marred by the grate, while the grate itself affects both his sight and 'brain'. The 'day' seems only a further torment to him, since he is an outcast from it; and his 'food' which is unnaturally 'tasteless' and 'unsocial', has also affected his nature: it has made him like 'a beast of prey'. Even his mind can find no respite 'in its savage mood'; and clearly Tasso is unable to forget the 'outrage - calumny - and wrong' that has been done to him, nor the 'Imputed madness'. His 'prisoned solitude' has reduced him to a state of inhumanity; he has accommodated himself to the physical conditions of his imprisonment.

But, despite the bleak and negative picture Byron has projected here (and the final image of the 'cave' which is a 'lair' and perhaps a 'grave', is the obverse of the 'hermitage' and 'second home' of The Prisoner of Chillon).<sup>1</sup> he has unostentatiously created the image of a bird (specifically, an eagle) in a cage. The 'beast of prey' that couches in its 'cave', refers us to the

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1. The Prisoner of Chillon. 378 and 380.

'eagle-spirit' of the second line. And it is this image that he develops in the subsequent lines of this passage and twists into a more fruitful idea.

All this hath somewhat worn me, and may wear,  
But must be borne. I stoop not to despair;  
For I have battled with mine agony,  
And made me wings wherewith to overfly  
The narrow circus of my dungeon wall,  
And freed the Holy Sepulchre from thrall...

19/24

The image of the 'eagle-spirit' is here developed in the 'wings' of poetry which have enabled Tasso to transcend his physical and mental imprisonment. The 'Holy Sepulchre' is, in the first instance, Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata; but it is also, by metonymy, his own mind (the mind that creates). So, by writing his poem, on the subject of freedom (a detail Byron clearly relishes), he simultaneously frees himself from the 'narrow circus' of his prison and from his 'agony'. In effect, poetic creativity is the means of liberating himself from himself; and it is precisely this aim that Byron gives as his reason for writing poetry in his Journal for 1813/14:

To withdraw myself from myself (oh that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all; and publishing is also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself.<sup>1</sup>

However, as this passage suggests and as the poem now goes on to record, such liberation from self can only be achieved during the actual process of creation:

But this is o'er - my pleasant task is done; -  
My long-sustaining Friend of many years!  
If I do blot thy final page with tears,  
Know, that my sorrows have wrung from me none.  
But Thou, my young creation! my Soul's child!  
Which ever playing round me came and smiled,  
And wooed me from myself with thy sweet sight,  
Thou too art gone - and so is my delight;  
And therefore do I weep and inly bleed ...

33/41

In the same way as the 'Holy Sepulchre' combines both the poem created and the mind which creates it, here too we find a similar unity between the 'pleasant task' and the 'long-sustaining Friend', which is more cogently depicted in the image of the child. The image is strikingly apt; for it

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1. LJ. III, 225.

emphasizes the unison of poet and poem while the latter is in the process of creation. But, just as a child grows up to lead an existence independent of its parent, so does the poet's inspiration mature into words and take on an objective existence in the completed poem. The growth of the poem has sustained him, has been his 'delight', his 'Friend', his 'pleasant task'; but its completion leaves him, in the words of Bonnivard, 'doubly lone'.<sup>1</sup>

The two central ideas arising from these lines (the liberation of self from self during composition in the Daedalus/Icarus image of lines 19/24, and the eventual independence of the work of art from the artist who created it in the image of the child in lines 33/41), echo Byron's expressions in Childe Harold III. 6:<sup>2</sup>

'Tis to create, and in creating live  
A being more intense, that we endow  
With form our fancy, gaining as we give  
The life we image, even as I do now.  
What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,  
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,  
Invisible but gazing, as I glow  
Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,  
And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feeling's dearth.<sup>3</sup>

The emphatic use of the present tense, particularly the use of the present participle ('in creating', 'gaining', 'gazing', 'feeling'), draws attention to the 'intense' life that is lived during creativity; and the penultimate line, 'Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth' (italics added), underlines the unity of poet and poem - again, during creativity - in similar language and imagery as is used by Tasso ('Soul of my thought' matching 'my Soul's child'; and both the stanza and the lines delivered by Tasso invoke the image of birth and of a child). Yet again, line 5 of the stanza captures the eventual distinction between the artificer and the artifact, the immortality of which is re-iterated in Childe Harold IV, 5 ('The beings of the mind are not of clay;/ Essentially immortal, they create/ And multiply in us a brighter ray/ And more beloved existence'), and is picked up again at the end of The Lament of Tasso.

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1. The Prisoner of Chillon, 292: significantly, the bird is also only a temporary comfort.
  2. Whilst also pointing forward to Childe Harold IV, 5.
  3. PW. II, 78.

With this emphasis behind us, the question now arises as to how Tasso, without the felicity of writing poetry, will cope when confronted with his own 'identity' again.

Thou too art ended - what is left me now?  
For I have anguish yet to bear - and how?  
I know not that - but in the innate force  
Of my own spirit shall be found resource.

43/46

This is a familiar assertion which recalls The Prisoner of Chillon and Manfred, III, iv, 127/136: Tasso insists that his ability to endure resides in his self-dependence, his 'innate force'. But this is an early moment in the poem to make such an affirmation, there are still some two hundred lines of 'lament' to go; and whether or not the remainder of the poem bears testimony to his statement must now be considered. Tasso tells us that the reason for his imprisonment was his love for Leonora (50/56). But he had never disclosed his love ('I told it not - I breathed it not - it was/Sufficient to itself, its own reward', 124/125):

Thou wert to me a crystal-girded shrine,  
Worshipped at holy distance, and around  
Hallowed and meekly kissed the saintly ground;

... Love

Had robed thee with a glory, and arrayed  
Thy lineaments in beauty that dismayed -  
Oh! not dismayed - but awed, like One above!

129/135

Quite clearly, this reverential love is idolatry which, as he goes on to say, 'is no marvel' (149), for from his birth his 'soul was drunk with Love' (150) and made 'Idols' of 'objects all inanimate' (152/153), 'whereby they grew, a Paradise' (154). In this 'Paradise', he had 'dreamed uncounted hours' (156), had been punished for so doing, and had 'Returned and wept alone, and dreamed again/The visions which arise without a sleep' (164/165). Eventually, his 'whole heart exhaled into One Want' (168) -

till the day  
I found the thing I sought - and that was thee;  
And then I lost my being, all to be  
Absorbed in thine; - the world was passed away; -  
Thou didst annihilate the earth to me!

169/173

All this preceded his present confinement, and his very returning to the subject now seems to emphasize that this is part of the 'anguish' he has 'yet to bear' (44); for he is cut off from Leonora - and from what she represents. What does she represent? She is associated with his youth, strictly speaking the idealism of his youth and its innocence ('Paradise' and the 'dreamed' 'hours' and 'visions'); she is a saint or a goddess figure (as suggested in lines 129/135); and she is an object in whom he had 'lost' his 'being' (171/173).<sup>1</sup> Taken together, these associations suggest that Leonora is a figure of redemption from self, from whose aid he is now severed.<sup>2</sup> Leonora is the one person who could save Tasso from his imprisonment ('Oh Leonora! wilt not thou reply?' [49], 'Thou pitiest not' [110]), as is perhaps patent from the whole apostrophe of the poem. Nonetheless, despite Leonora's silence and inaction:

The very love which locked me to my chain  
Hath lightened half its weight; and for the rest,  
Though heavy, lent me vigour to sustain,  
And look to thee with undivided breast,  
And foil the ingenuity of Pain.

144/148

At first sight this may seem commendable. But there is a circularity here: what imprisoned him also sustains him, what sustains him imprisons him. In a sense his love is his prison. As long as Tasso continues to find consolation in this love he will not come to terms with his isolation but merely prolong his mental imprisonment. He must learn to relinquish Leonora; for his dependence on her, even in thought, is a clinging to the past and to false hopes, as is evident from the following passage:

Look on a love which knows not to despair,  
But all unquenched is still my better part,  
Dwelling deep in my shut and silent heart,  
As dwells the gathered lightning in its cloud,  
Encompassed with its dark and rolling shroud,  
Till struck, - forth flies the all-ethereal dart!  
And thus at the collision of thy name  
The vivid thought still flashes through my frame,  
And for a moment all things as they were  
Flit by me; - they are gone - I am the same.

111/120

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1. Cf. LJ. V, 104/105, Byron's Alpine Journal entry, '... nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity ...'
  2. Indeed, her association with youth, nature, purity and ideal beauty is strongly suggestive of Bonnivard's younger brother in The Prisoner of Chillon.

The very words he uses here reflect his imprisoned state ('shut and silent heart', 'shroud', 'Encompassed'); and though the 'thought' may flash out like 'lightning' out of its cloud, the mental release it brings Tasso is clearly only momentary and is moreover a retreat into the past (119/120). Thus, in the same way as creativity enabled him to transcend his prison for a certain duration, so too does the thought of Leonora. But both are merely temporary escapes from self, the return from which only entrenches him further in self. That both are eventually unsatisfactory is confirmed in Tasso's penultimate 'lament':

Yet I do feel at times my mind decline,  
But with a sense of its decay: I see  
Unwonted lights along my prison shine,  
And a strange Demon, who is vexing me  
With pilfering pranks and petty pains ...  
I thought mine enemies had been but Man,  
But Spirits may be leagued with them - all Earth  
Abandons - Heaven forgets me; - in the dearth  
Of such defence the Powers of Evil can -  
It may be - tempt me further, - and prevail  
Against the outworn creature they assail.  
Why in this furnace is my spirit proved,  
Like steel in tempering fire? because I loved?

138/193

198/205

These 'Spirits' or 'Powers of Evil' recall those who attempt to claim Manfred in the closing lines of Manfred.<sup>1</sup> Both these and the 'Demon', despite the fact that the latter is a historical detail,<sup>2</sup> suggest the disordered misgivings of Tasso's mind, his memories or 'the Mind's canker' (5). Indeed, the exclamation 'all Earth/ Abandons - Heaven forgets me' (199/200) is the cry of the isolated man against his isolation, and his appeal to their nonetheless absent 'defence' (201), is a sign of his weakness - a negation of the mind's capability of enduring alone (a denial of his earlier assertion of self-dependence: 'in the innate force/Of my own spirit shall be found resource', (45/46).)

1. III, iv, 79/141.

2. Poetry. IV, 150n.

The final couplet here will remind us of the opening line of the poem: in the same way as imprisonment 'tries' his 'thrilling frame' and 'eagle-spirit', so too here is his spirit 'proved': his imprisonment is a trial, a test, of his endurance in isolation. The Hell-like imagery of this passage, and particularly the 'furnace' (204), will remind us that the mind can make 'a Hell of Heaven'<sup>1</sup>. Clearly the 'furnace' is that of the mind which is not reconciled to itself and has yet to learn to be so.

And this brings us to the final part of the poem, which in turn links up with two earlier passages - all of which therefore will be yoked together here.

I have been patient, let me be so yet;  
I had forgotten half I would forget,  
But it revives - Oh! would it were my lot  
To be forgetful as I am forgot! ...  
Feel I not wroth with those who placed me here?  
Who have debased me in the minds of men,  
Debarring me the usage of my own,  
Blighting my life in best of its career,  
Branding my thoughts as things to shun and fear?  
Would I not pay them back these pangs again,  
And teach them inward Sorrow's stifled groan?  
The struggle to be calm, and cold distress,  
Which undermines our Stoical success?  
No! - still too proud to be vindictive - I  
Have pardoned Princes' insults, and would die.

78/81

95/105

... If I bear and bore  
The much I have recounted, and the more  
Which hath no words, - 'tis that I would not die  
And sanction with self-slaughter the dull lie  
Which snared me here, and with the brand of shame  
Stamp Madness deep into my memory,  
And woo Compassion to a blighted name,  
Sealing the sentence which my foes proclaim.  
No - it shall be immortal! ...

211/219

The desire for forgetfulness (78/81) and death (105), and the tendency to commit suicide (211/219 and also suggested in 201/203), refer us to Manfred's desire for 'Oblivion - self-oblivion!'<sup>2</sup> and his attempt at suicide which the Chamois Hunter prevents.<sup>3</sup> Such a death-wish, however, is evidence of Tasso's reluctance to face up to the consequences of his isolation. As he realizes, 'self-slaughter' (214) would be an admission of defeat. Hence, his refusal

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1. Paradise Lost, I, 255. See also Manfred, III, iv, 127/136, The Prisoner of Chillon, 233/250.
  2. Manfred, I, 1, 144.
  3. Manfred, I, ii; see also The Prisoner of Chillon, 233/250.

to succumb to the temptation of suicide is first and foremost a principle of pride. He will not give credence to his enemies' accusations of 'Madness' by so doing, nor will he tarnish his 'name' by spuriously drawing 'Compassion' on himself by such an act; for to do so would be humiliation. In the same way, he will not be tempted to revenge: he is 'still too proud to be vindictive', and instead has 'pardoned' the insults of his wrongdoers.<sup>1</sup> This seems to demonstrate his self-control and the superiority he feels he has over those who imprisoned him. And indeed, such pride and self-mastery together form the essence of his 'innate force' (45). As he goes on to re-iterate in the final line quoted above, and the passage that succeeds it, his sense of superiority is justified in his conviction of his immortality through poetry:

No - it shall be immortal! - and I make  
A future temple of my present cell,  
Which nations yet shall visit for my sake.  
While thou, Ferrara! when no longer dwell  
The ducal chiefs within thee, shalt fall down,  
And crumbling piecemeal view thy hearthless halls,  
A Poet's wreath shall be thine only crown, -  
A Poet's dungeon thy most far renown ...

219/226

The sentiments expressed in the first two lines here, seem to point forward to those raised more doubtfully by Byron concerning himself, in Childe Harold IV:

If my fame should be, as my fortunes are,  
Of hasty growth and blight, and dull Oblivion bar

My name from out the temple where the dead  
Are honoured by the nations - let it be -  
And light the laurels on a loftier head!<sup>2</sup>

Tasso feels no such resignation however. He clearly relishes the irony of the prospect of his dungeon outlasting the 'hearthless halls' of the 'ducal chiefs', and of his laurel ('wreath') and dungeon being Ferrara's only claim to 'renown'. Evidently this is a reflection on the temporal power of the

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1. This clearly prefigures, in an unformulated way, the 'curse' of 'Forgiveness' in Childe Harold IV, 134/135.
  2. CHP. IV, 9/10.



'ducal chiefs' and the universal ('nations') and eternal influence of the poet. And had the poem ended here, it might have been on a more fortuitous and positive note. For it would have suggested that Tasso had achieved a reconciliation with his prison and with himself. But he adapts these very sentiments to his relationship with Leonora; and, with the poem concluding on a note of regret, we find that such expectations of immortality are no compensation for his present imprisonment. In effect, he does not come to terms with himself or transcend his prison, which is why he is still in prison, lamenting, at the end of the poem. 'But Thou', he exclaims to Leonora, 'shalt have' -

One half the laurel which o'ershades my grave.  
No power in death can tear our names apart,  
As none in life could rend thee from my heart.  
Yes, Leonora! it shall be our fate  
To be entwined for ever - but too late!

243/247

This suggests a retraction from the proud, forward-looking position Tasso had reached in the preceding passage (219/226). Despite the fact that he still looks forward to immortality with Leonora (perhaps literally, in a life beyond; but 'laurel' and 'names' suggest that they will be 'entwined for ever' in the minds of others through his poetry, indeed through this very 'lament'), his cry of 'but too late!' is a cry of that 'anguish' he has 'yet to bear' (44). Those three words undermine any complacency or sense of positive accomplishment. And, since the poem ends with this cry, it is difficult to regard Tasso as acquiescing in the thought of immortality at all (whether with Leonora, or through poetry); for, immortality resolves nothing of his isolation now - and then, it will be 'too late'. Indeed, the reliance on immortality is a postponement of Tasso's present responsibility of facing up to his isolation (another form of death-wish); and the suggestion seems to be that surrender to the future is equally as invalid as clinging to the past.

It was suggested earlier that the poem seems to draw attention to itself as a poem, and that the silence of its audience (Leonora) makes us

more aware of the agony and isolation of the persona. Indeed, we are aware of the futility of the appeal throughout, and it is not surprising that he is still in prison at the close of the poem. For, the poem is obsessed with itself. Quite unlike when he was writing Gerusalemme Liberata and 'revelled among men and things divine' (25), Tasso has not here made himself 'wings wherewith to overfly/ The narrow circus of [his] dungeon wall' (22/23). The whole poem being a 'lament', reflects rather than transcends (even temporarily) his imprisonment, and thereby suggests a deeper entrenchment in self.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, despite these final lines, Tasso's earlier assertions of endurance (45/46, 219/226), are valuable as a basis on which to remould the self and to build in a fresh direction. Byron himself re-iterates the position in Childe Harold IV (1817/18; pub. 1818)

But from their nature will the tannen grow  
Loftiest on loftiest and least shelter'd rocks,  
Rooted in barrenness, where nought below  
Of soil supports them 'gainst the Alpine shocks  
Of eddying storms; yet springs the trunk, and mocks  
The howling tempest, till its height and frame  
Are worthy of the mountains from whose blocks  
Of bleak, grey, granite, into life it came,  
And grew a giant tree; - the mind may grow the same. 20

Existence may be borne, and the deep root  
Of life and sufferance make its firm abode  
In bare and desolated bosoms: mute  
The camel labours with the heaviest load,  
And the wolf dies in silence, - not bestow'd  
In vain should such example be; if they,  
Things of ignoble or of savage mood,  
Endure and shrink not, we of nobler clay  
May temper it to bear, - it is but for a day.<sup>2</sup> 21

In his 'commentary' on Childe Harold IV, McGann states that 'The Lament of Tasso - composed just prior to Canto IV - anticipates a central preoccupation

1. Since Byron was evidently familiar with the episode of Ugolino in Dante's Inferno, XXXIII, 42/47 [Cary's translation], as is clear from The Prophecy of Dante, II, 90, Eliot's reference to it in The Waste Land, 413/414 does not seem inappropriate or inadmissible to cite here: 'each in his prison/Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison'. Tasso's thinking of his prison, his obsession with it, confirms his self-imprisonment.
2. PW, II, 131.

of CHP IV.' Essentially that 'preoccupation' is 'the aftermath of B's marriage separation': The Canto 'draws repeated parallels between "the ruins of Rome" and the "ruin" of B's own life at the hands of his detractors and enemies, including his wife. The poem's prophecy of an Italian risorgimento is equally a statement of personal determination.'<sup>1</sup> We shall not be dealing with Childe Harold IV, but the 'personal determination' of the above two stanzas amply reflects that which we have considered poetically in The Lament of Tasso. Furthermore, the extended metaphorical image in stanza 20, will remind us of the heroic situation of the individual symbolized by mountains (or, as here, by the 'tannen' which grow to be 'worthy of the mountains'), which we saw in the previous chapter. Also, the statement 'Existence may be borne', and the image of suffering as a burden that must be endured without complaint ('mute', 'in silence') in stanza 21, refer us to the more imperative example developed in The Lament of Tasso, but implicitly censures its lack of 'silence'.

However, these assertions still remain mere assertions; and, although we can perhaps see a more determined, more aggressive outlook in The Lament of Tasso than we can in The Prisoner of Chillon, we have not seen the mind positively engaging with life again. Enduring existence is one thing; turning that endurance to practical effect is another. It is not until the individual ceases to be preoccupied with himself and re-engages with the objective world, that he persuasively proves his mental liberation and self-dependence; and this is the principal theme we shall consider in our next poem, The Prophecy of Dante. If, as is quite plausible, The Lament of Tasso is regarded as Byron's Inferno, then The Prophecy of Dante may be said to represent his Purgatorio. For, as we shall see, the latter picks up where the former leaves off: it recapitulates Tasso's situation, initially, but develops from that situation in a more positive, constructive direction.

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1. PW, II, 317.

The Prophecy of Dante

Although published with Marino Faliero in April 1821, The Prophecy of Dante was written two years earlier in June 1819. In his 'Preface' to the poem, Byron himself draws attention to the correspondence between it and The Lament of Tasso:

In the course of a visit to the city of Ravenna in the summer of 1819, it was suggested to the author that having composed something on the subject of Tasso's confinement, he should do the same on Dante's exile, - the tomb of the poet forming one of the principal objects of interest in that city, both to the native and to the stranger.<sup>1</sup>

As Coleridge somewhat ingenuously notes:

It would have been strange if Byron, who had sounded his Lament over the sufferings of Tasso, and who had become de facto if not de jure a naturalized Italian, had forborne to associate his name and fame with the sacred memory of the 'Gran padre Alighier.'<sup>2</sup>

This is not the aim of Byron's writing his poem, though Coleridge does highlight an important point to be borne in mind: Byron had indeed become 'de facto if not de jure a naturalized Italian'. As he himself wrote to Murray, in a passage that has direct bearing on the message of The Prophecy of Dante:

I shall think it by far the most interesting spectacle and moment in existence - to see the Italians send the Barbarians of all nations back to their own dens. - - I have lived long enough among them - to feel more for them as a nation than for any other people in existence - but they want Union - and they want principle.<sup>3</sup>

The Prophecy of Dante is, as this passage suggests, an overtly political poem. Again writing to Murray later the same year, and telling him of the disturbances in Italy, Byron urged: 'If you want to publish the Prophecy of Dante - you never will have a better time';<sup>4</sup> so also, to his friend Hobhouse: 'Now is a good time for the Prophecy of Dante; - Events have acted as an Advertisement thereto.'<sup>5</sup> Moreover, according to Medwin, a somewhat unreliable witness

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1. Poetry. IV, 243.
  2. Poetry. IV, 237.
  3. LJ. VII, 77, April 16, 1820.
  4. LJ. VII, 172, September 7th, 1820.
  5. LJ. VII, 205, October 17th, 1820.

though in this case his record seems dependable, Byron stated in 1821: 'This poem was intended for the Italians ... and therefore I wished to have it translated. ... It was looked at in a political light, and they indulged in my dream of liberty, and the resurrection of Italy. Alas! it was only a dream!'<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, Byron's discussion of translations in his 'Preface',<sup>2</sup> seems an open invitation to the translation of the present poem. Furthermore, his proposition, again in the 'Preface', that his employment of the terza rima might be 'considered as a metrical experiment' not before 'tried in our language'.<sup>3</sup> is politically suggestive. Clearly he was unaware of Shelley's use of the terza rima in Prince Athanase (1817), The Woodman and the Nightingale (1818) or the Ode to the West Wind (Autumn, 1819), so his claim suggests that he did indeed regard his own use of it as a literary 'experiment'. But there seems to be a political motive as well. For, by choosing a specifically Italianate literary form, and by Europeanizing it (or, strictly speaking, Anglicizing it), he implicitly establishes himself as the champion of the Italians' cultural inheritance and their right to political independence. That is, the very choice of the terza rima is a political act, aligning him with the cause of the Italians against their oppressors (in particular, the Austrians). Similarly, his political alignment is underscored by his use of Dante as a persona. In the Ode on Venice (1818), for instance, Byron addresses the Venetians in his own poetic voice as 'a northern wanderer'.<sup>4</sup> By so doing, he sets a distance between them and himself: he is a spectator rather than a participator. By speaking through the persona of Dante in The Prophecy of Dante, he effectively brings himself closer to the Italians; he identifies with them by speaking as one of them. Hence, paradoxically, the use of persona bridges the gap between spectator and participator.<sup>5</sup> As we shall also

1. Medwin's 'Conversations of Lord Byron', edited by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton, New Jersey, 1966), p. 159.
2. Poetry. IV, 244.
3. Poetry. IV, 244.
4. Poetry. IV, 193, line 5.
5. Compare the similar result of the use of persona in the Napoleon poems, discussed in the previous chapter.

see, there is a further difference between the personae of The Prisoner of Chillon and The Lament of Tasso and the present persona, in so far as there is a progression from a personal focus to issues of a public nature.

Finally, before turning to the poem itself, by using the vehicle of a 'prophecy' Byron breaks normal time-patterns. There is, in a sense, a double time scheme: speaking through Dante, he prophesies what has already passed - foretells what is already history. Clearly by so doing, he recalls to the present Italians those who have formed the spirit of their country (with the suggestion, of course, that the present Italians should emulate and make themselves worthy of that spirit). But, at the same time such 'prophecy' emphasizes the visionary nature of the poem (its timelessness and freedom from all limitations), which, in turn, suggests the individual 'prophet's' liberation from the prison of, initially, time and the world (the world which is a 'wider prison'),<sup>1</sup> and eventually, the self.

In the 'Preface', Byron asks the reader:

to suppose that Dante addresses him in the interval between the conclusion of the Divina Commedia and his death, and shortly before the latter event, foretelling the fortunes of Italy in general in the ensuing centuries.<sup>2</sup>

This merely states (unnecessarily) what is clearly and adequately represented and expressed in the text itself.

Once more in Man's frail world! which I had left  
So long that 'twas forgotten; and I feel  
The weight of clay again, - too soon bereft  
Of the Immortal Vision which could heal  
My earthly sorrows, and to God's own skies  
Lift me from that deep Gulf without repeal,  
Where late my ears rung with the damned cries  
Of Souls in hopeless bale; and from that place  
Of lesser torment, whence men may arise  
Pure from the fire to join the Angelic race;  
Midst whom my own bright Beatrice blessed  
My spirit with her light ...

I, 1/12

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1. The Prisoner of Chillon. 323.
  2. Poetry. IV, 243.

This will remind us of the opening of The Lament of Tasso,<sup>1</sup> just as his writing of Gerusalemme Liberata sustained Tasso for a period during his imprisonment, enabling him to 'overfly/The narrow circus of [his] dungeon wall'.<sup>2</sup> so Dante's writing his 'Immortal Vision' has, temporarily, freed him from the bondage of 'clay'. Again then, the process of creativity is represented as a means of transcending the physical and mental imprisonment of self: his 'Vision' was able to 'heal' Dante's 'earthly sorrows'. (The 'damned cries/Of Souls in hopeless bale' refer us to Part III of The Lament of Tasso.<sup>3</sup> where Tasso has to endure 'the long and maniac cry/Of minds and bodies in captivity'.<sup>4</sup>) The actual stages of Dante's 'Immortal Vision' (the three parts of his Divina Commedia) are succinctly captured in lines 6/12; so that despite the downward movement of the first three lines, there is the sense of rising up again from the 'Gulf', through 'that place/Of lesser torment', towards Beatrice. And in Beatrice we have, not surprisingly, the idealized figure of the redemptive woman again:

Thou sole pure Seraph of my earliest love,  
Love so ineffable, and so alone,  
That nought on earth could more my bosom move,  
And meeting thee in Heaven was but to meet  
That without which my Soul, like the arkless dove,  
Had wandered still in search of, nor her feet  
Relieved her wing till found; without thy light  
My Paradise had still been incomplete.

I, 20/27

The splendid pun in the final line here ('Paradise' combining both Dante's Paradiso and the ideal towards which he was striving), perhaps emphasizes the 'completing' influence of Beatrice on Dante. For, whereas in The Lament of Tasso, Tasso's love for Leonora entrenched him deeper in self and confirmed his prison, Dante's love for Beatrice is a positive force, lifting him out of himself and restraining him from taking revenge. That is, even after the

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1. The Lament of Tasso, 19/24.
  2. The Lament of Tasso, 22/23.
  3. The Lament of Tasso, 65/77.
  4. The Lament of Tasso, 65/66.

experience of the 'Immortal Vision' she remains Dante's tutelary spirit. This is not to say that she resolves all Dante's conflicting feelings: he still resents his exile and the 'many wrongs' done to him (I, 120). But, as the following passage suggests, she has a mediating influence on him:

These things are not made for forgetfulness,  
 Florence shall be forgotten first; too raw  
 The wound, too deep the wrong, and the distress  
 Of such endurance too prolonged to make  
 My pardon greater, her injustice less,  
 Though late repented; yet - yet for her sake  
 I feel some fonder yearnings, and for thine,  
 My own Beatrice, I would hardly take  
 Vengeance upon the land which once was mine,  
 And still is hallowed by thy dust's return,  
 Which would protect the murderess like a shrine,  
 And save ten thousand foes by thy sole urn.

I, 92/103

The conflict of emotions is apparent here: he will not take 'Vengeance' against Florence, yet his 'wound' is still 'raw'; Florence is a 'murderess' yet he still feels 'some fonder yearnings' for her. And it is Beatrice who mediates between these feelings, drawing out Dante's more conciliatory attitude to Florence, and who eventually seems to become identified with the spirit of Florence: 'the land' is 'hallowed' and protected by her. She thus seems to reconcile Dante to Florence as an entity (as opposed to the mere Florentines who wronged him). And this raises the important distinction between the historical life of Florence and the temporary existence of the individuals who at any time live in her: the spirit of the whole is superior to the individual constituents at any one time, including Dante himself:<sup>1</sup>

Man wrongs, and Time avenges, and my name  
 May form a monument not all obscure,  
 Though such was not my Ambition's end or aim,  
 To add to the vain-glorious list of those  
 Who dabble in the pettiness of fame ...  
 I would have had my Florence great and free;  
 Oh Florence! Florence! ...

I, 50/54

I, 59/60

1. Compare Byron's disgust with the Venetians as opposed to Venice, expressed in a letter to Hoppner, July 2nd, 1819, LJ. VI, 174/175: "the disgust which Venice excites when fairly compared with any other city in this part of Italy - when I say Venice I mean the Venetians - the City itself is superb as its History - but the people are what - I never thought them till they taught me to think so".



The first two lines will remind us of Tasso's expectations;<sup>1</sup> but Dante reverses the worth of such hopes. Effectively, he is underlining the unimportance of self in the face of the whole: 'such was not my Ambition's end or aim, ... I would have had my Florence great and free'. This outward looking attitude, the subsuming of self in the cause of the whole, prepares us for the beginning of the prophecy proper in Canto II.<sup>2</sup> Yet the long closing passage of Canto I portrays a relapse into self, and we feel we are back with Tasso in his prison, listening to his 'lament':

Alas! with what a weight upon my brow  
The sense of earth and earthly things come back,  
Corrosive passions, feelings dull and low,  
The heart's quick throb upon the mental rack,  
Long day, and dreary night; the retrospect  
Of half a century bloody and black,  
And the frail few years I may yet expect  
Hoary and hopeless, but less hard to bear,  
For I have been too long and deeply wrecked  
On the lone rock of desolate Despair,  
To lift my eyes more to the passing sail  
Which shuns that reef so horrible and bare;  
Nor raise my voice - for who would heed my wail?  
I am not of this people, nor this age,  
And yet my harpings will unfold a tale  
Which shall preserve these times when not a page  
Of their perturbed annals could attract  
An eye to gaze upon their civil rage,  
Did not my verse embalm full many an act  
Worthless as they who wrought it: 'tis the doom  
Of spirits of my order to be racked  
In life, to wear their hearts out, and consume  
Their days in endless strife, and die alone ...

I, 130/152

And so he goes on for the remaining twenty-six lines of the Canto, complaining of his wife ('that fatal She', line 172), and ending with the proud assertion 'They made an Exile - not a Slave of me.' (178). Arguably, this does indeed represent a regression to the position of Tasso in his dungeon; or, not necessarily a regression but a repetition of a theme Byron has already laboured over before. Again we find the self-torture and self-destructiveness of the

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1. The Lament of Tasso, 219/226; also, Childe Harold IV, 9/10.

2. Cf. also Marino Faliero, II, 11, 87/92, and II, 11, 181/191.

isolated individual ('Corrosive passions', the 'heart's quick throb upon the mental rack'), when he awakens to a consciousness of time, mortality and self: 'day', 'night', the past ('retrospect'), and the future ('the frail few years I may yet expect'). The 'quick' in the fourth line cunningly suggests both fast and alive or vital, so that his 'mental rack' is related to the sensuous life of 'weight', 'sense', 'feelings' to which he has returned from his self-liberating experience of poetic creativity. This emphasizes the transcendent state in which he wrote his 'Immortal Vision', but it also emphasizes the inability of poetry to sustain him once the experience is over.<sup>1</sup>

The picture depicted here is almost exaggeratedly grim. Such choice phrases as 'dreary night', 'bloody and black', 'Hoary and hopeless', 'desolate Despair' certainly freight the passage with the blackest colours (reminiscent of Bonnivard's spiritual death,<sup>2</sup> and of the opening lines of The Lament of Tasso), but they are almost mannerisms. What seems to have happened is that the poet has lost sight of his persona: Byron seems no longer to be speaking through Dante, but has self-indulgently become engrossed with his own picture of desolation, and is voicing his own emotions. This is perhaps supported by the introduction and elaboration of the spurious legend that Dante's marriage was unhappy: 'that fatal She', 'the cold partner who has brought/Destruction for a dowry' (172, 173/174). If this lapse is so, then it suggests how even in poetry Byron finds self-detachment uneasy when attempting to empathize with the emotions of his subject.<sup>3</sup>

The image of the shipwrecked sailor finely captures that 'Despair' which is so imprisoned on the 'lone rock' of self that it does not even attempt to save itself.<sup>4</sup> Bernard Blackstone takes exception to 'deeply wrecked': it

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1. Cf. The Lament of Tasso, 33/41.

2. The Prisoner of Chillon, 233/250.

3. Cf. a similar slip in the fictive authority of the persona in 'From the French', stanza 4.

4. Cf. The Prisoner of Chillon, 318/331.

is 'a bad phrase'.<sup>1</sup> The objection is fair enough. But surely, in its context 'deeply' is so unusual as to be arresting: and, when we stop to consider it, we see that Byron is trying to suggest the quality of 'wrecked'. He has been 'deeply' wrecked emotionally, psychologically, mentally: 'deeply' is deep within.

Two further words seem to beg comment in this passage: 'Perturbed' and 'embalm'. In meaning (both in Latin and English), 'perturbed' is similar to 'disturbed' which might be thought its more common form. But 'perturbed' also suggests the duration of time ('per' as throughout), and is perhaps more emphatic ('per' as very) than 'disturbed'. It thus seems to imply the utter confusion throughout history that the 'annals' record. Poetically, however, 'perturbed' contributes better to the preponderant use of alliterative ps and ts in lines 143/146, which captures the contempt Dante feels for 'this age' (compare the alliterative use of bs, ds and ws in lines 130/142, which is reserved for the 'weight' of desolation). As for 'embalm', it seems to unite the idea of funereal preservation (of something dead, or that otherwise might be forgotten), with the idea of something sweet, fragrant or, at any rate, pleasing. That is, in its curious ambivalence, it conjoins the idea of death with the sense of something alive. Thus the implication is that poetry can transform 'full many an act/Worthless as they who wrought it', into something worth preserving: poetry as a catalyst. And this brings us to a more constructive view of the passage, or rather, of its location. For, two phrases tend to relieve it of its utter gloom: 'but less hard to bear' (137), and 'And yet my harpings ...' (144). The 'but' and the 'And yet' are qualifying conjunctions that seek to counter or to moderate the main statement; and, together with the extreme enjambment (most noticeable in the last ten lines cited here), they suggest a straining away from the gloom depicted - an urge forward to a positive attitude. Hence the passage re-iterates that the

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1. Byron: A Survey (London: Longmans, 1975), p. 175.

conflicts within the individual still exist and have not been resolved, but that there is the possibility that they may be overcome. Lines 149/150 in particular, take us back to Childe Harold III,<sup>1</sup> and to the eldest of Bonnivard's brothers,<sup>2</sup> and, of course, re-emphasize what has already been described in lines 130/139, though more bluntly: the 'doom' of the isolated individual condemned to his own self-destruction.

Had the poem ended here, we would have been presented with a mere repetition of The Lament of Tasso (or perhaps worse). But Canto II, before its twentieth line, revokes the grim position reached here. I suggest therefore that this passage, saturated in the miseries of the 'mental rack' and self-indulgent and self-pitying as it is, is structurally splendidly placed. For, the crucial significance of the opening of Canto II is made, thereby, all the more forceful:

The Spirit of the fervent days of Old,  
When words were things that came to pass, and Thought  
Flashed o'er the future, bidding men behold  
Their children's children's doom already brought  
Forth from the abyss of Time which is to be,  
The Chaos of events, where lie half-wrought  
Shapes that must undergo mortality;  
What the great Seers of Israel wore within,  
That Spirit was on them, and is on me,  
And if, Cassandra-like, amidst the din  
Of conflict none will hear, or hearing heed  
This voice from out the Wilderness, the sin  
Be theirs, and my own feelings be my meed,  
The only guerdon I have ever known.  
Hast thou not bled? and hast thou still to bleed,  
Italia? Ah! to me such things, foreshown  
With dim sepulchral light, bid me forget  
In thine irreparable wrongs my own;  
We can have but one Country, and even yet  
Thou'rt mine - my bones shall be within thy breast,  
My Soul within thy language, which once set  
With our old Roman sway in the wide West;  
But I will make another tongue arise  
As lofty and more sweet, in which expressed  
The hero's ardour, or the lover's sighs,  
Shall find alike such sounds for every theme  
That every word, as brilliant as thy skies,  
Shall realise a Poet's proudest dream,  
And make thee Europe's Nightingale of Song;  
So that all present speech to thine shall seem

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1. CHP. III, 42/44
  2. The Prisoner of Chillon, 140/144.

The note of meaner birds, and every tongue  
 Confess its barbarism when compared with thine.  
 This shalt thou owe to him thou didst so wrong,  
 The Tuscan bard, the banished Ghibelline.

II, 1/34

This is marvellous - Byron at his least self-indulgent - and contains in essence the purport of the whole poem and the present argument. For here Byron takes on the specific role of 'prophet' (shrewdly related to biblical authority, and in particular to John the Baptist - 'vox clamens in deserto',<sup>1</sup>) and loses his personal wrongs in the 'irreparable wrongs' of his 'Country'. That is, the role chosen and the surrendering of self to the cause, enable him to transcend the 'canker'<sup>2</sup> of mental imprisonment. The central attitude is one of determination: 'and is on me' (9), 'my bones shall be ' (20), 'I will make' (22), and lines 25/27. And the sense of poetry being a positive action, the Word becoming a deed, is apparent in the second line: 'When words were things that came to pass'. Of course, this again refers us to John.<sup>3</sup> and to Genesis;<sup>4</sup> but Byron was very fond of this phrase. He uses it on five other occasions and ascribes it to Mirabeau: 'the saying of Mirabeau, that "words are things".'<sup>5</sup> In his Journal for 1813/14, he writes 'are not "words things?" and such "words" very pestilent "things" too?';<sup>6</sup> in Childe Harold III, 114, he writes, somewhat despairingly, 'I do believe,/Though I have found them not, that there may be/Words which are things';<sup>7</sup> in Don Juan, III, 88, his attitude is positive again, 'But words are things, and a small drop of ink,/Falling like dew upon a thought, produces/That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think': as it is again in Marino Faliero. 'true words are things./And dying men's are things which long outlive,/And oftentimes avenge them'.<sup>8</sup> Although the phrase

1. John, 1, 23.
2. The Lament of Tasso, line 5.
3. John, 1, 1/5 and 14.
4. Genesis, 1, 3.
5. LJ, IV, 74.
6. LJ, III, 207, and see LJ, XI, 224 for correction.
7. PH, II, 118.
8. Marino Faliero, V, 1, 289/291; Poetry, IV, 441.

is intelligible enough, it can best be glossed by Byron himself: 'To make my own the mind of other men,/The enlightener of nations',<sup>1</sup> and, as he wrote to Murray in July 1818, he once wrote poetry for the 'love of fame (not as an end but as a means to obtain that influence over men's minds - which is power in itself & in it's consequences').<sup>2</sup> It is this position of 'influence' or 'enlightener' to which he returns in The Prophecy of Dante, and which is clear from the above passage. Indeed, just as 'Shapes' 'must undergo mortality' (line 7), so must 'the Word' be 'made flesh',<sup>3</sup> the Word must become embodied in a deed. The deed is that of prophecy, but it is also that of resistance to oppression or tyranny through the creation of language taken to its highest pitch (123/132): language, poetry becomes a 'weapon'.<sup>4</sup> Notice that in lines 123/132, Dante will conquer 'every tongue' (131) through 'every word' (127) and 'every theme' (126); and notice more significantly, that the 'Poet's proudest dream' (128) is united with his making his country 'Europe's Nightingale of Song' (129). That is, writing becomes a political act. It is also noticeable that 'every word' is through simile related to the brilliance of the Italian 'skies' (which, thereby underpins the nationalistic use of language); and that 'every word' 'Shall realise a Poet's proudest dream' (28, italics added); the 'dream' of national liberation is realised (made real, made existent) through the Word.

But the prophecy, the creative Word, projects a pretty black parallel of Genesis:

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1. Manfred, III, 1, 106/107.
  2. LJ, VI, 61.
  3. John, 1, 14.
  4. See LJ, IV, 62: 'I am for any weapon - the pen, till one can find something sharper, will do for a beginning.' [To Moore, February 16, 1814.]

The storms yet sleep, the clouds still keep their station,  
The unborn Earthquake yet is in the womb,  
The bloody Chaos yet expects Creation,  
But all things are disposing for thy doom;  
The Elements await but for the Word,  
'Let there be darkness!' and thou grow'st a tomb!  
Yes! thou, so beautiful, shalt feel the sword,  
Thou, Italy! so fair that Paradise,  
Revived in thee, blooms forth to man restored;  
Ah! must the sons of Adam lose it twice?

II, 40/49

If this is thought to be a parody, then it is parody in the strict terms defined by Byron when he justified his parody of the Ten Commandments in Don Juan.<sup>1</sup> 'it seems to me that all depends upon the intention of such a parody. If it be meant to throw ridicule on the sacred original, it is a sin; if it be intended to burlesque the profane subject, or to inculcate a moral truth, it is none'.<sup>2</sup> There is no 'intention' here to mock the story of creation or of Eden, but to criticize the 'Chaos' produced by tyranny, oppression and faction. As Dante prophesies to Italy, 'Thou must wither to each tyrant's will;/The Goth hath been, - the German, Frank, and Hun/Are yet to come' (II, 70/72); and, just as line 49 in the above passage suggests, the 'doom' of Italy's destruction at the hands of 'each tyrant's will', is the equivalent of a second Fall. That is, the tyranny of Man over his fellows is the mark of his fallen status.

Chester Mills has indicated the ideas of order and reason implied in the term Logos;<sup>3</sup> and it is precisely this ordering, the absence of which Dante mourns in these lines but which he counsels at the close of the Canto. Drawing attention to the natural impregnability of their country ('Why, Nature's self detains the Victor's car,/And makes your land impregnable', II, 121/122), he states that such a physical advantage only 'aids the warrior worthy of his birth' (II, 124). An interaction is thus established between Nature, 'land',

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1. DJ. I, 205/206.
  2. 'Reply to Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine'. Appendix IX, Prothero, IV, 495.
  3. 'The Prophecy of Dante', Chester H. Mills, The Byron Journal /1980/, p.57.

'warrior' and 'birth'; and the salient word is 'worthy'. For the 'warrior' disrupts the order of this interaction if he fails to be 'worthy' of (to live up to and to emulate), the spirit of his country (of which 'land' and 'birth' are figures). And, as Dante now urges, the first step towards order is unity:

Are ye not brave? Yes, yet the Ausonian soil  
Hath hearts, and hands, and arms, and hosts to bring  
Against Oppression; but how vain the toil,  
While still Division sows the seeds of woe  
And weakness, till the Stranger reaps the spoil.  
Oh! my own beauteous land! so long laid low,  
So long the grave of thy own children's hopes,  
When there is but required a single blow  
To break the chain, yet - yet the Avenger stops,  
And Doubt and Discord step 'twixt thine and thee,  
And join their strength to that which with thee copes;  
What is there wanting then to set thee free,  
And show thy beauty in its fullest light?  
To make the Alps impassable; and we,  
Her sons, may do this with one deed - Unite.

II, 131/145

The tension is dramatically sustained here so that the emphasis falls all the more weightily on the final word, which is also the final word of the Canto. Furthermore, the accumulation in the second line (132), finely reflects the potential resources that are available 'to bring/Against Oppression' (a forceful use of enjambment and line-opening - forcing the emphasis onto 'Against'); yet the very enumeration also reflects the 'Division' that undermines those resources. Similarly, the enjambment in lines 138/139 ('a single blow/To break the chain'), captures the potential power of the Italians which the halted and end-stopped remainder of line 139, 'yet - yet the Avenger stops,' counters (magnificently reflecting, in its turn, the 'Doubt' of the following line). And the irony of the 'strength' of 'Doubt', 'Discord' and 'Division' emphasizes that the Italians are as much an enemy to themselves as are the Austrians.<sup>1</sup> Significantly too, Dante moves from addressing the Italians in the first person singular, to uniting with them in the first person plural: that is, he moves from a position of spectator to that of participator. And both this and the linguistic movement reflect the unity he is urging. Thus

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1. Cf. Byron's letter to Murray, April 16th, 1820, LJ, VII, 77.



the Word seems to impose the very order for which it calls, and the black gospel of lines 40/49, is recast in its original creative mould: the 'bloody' Chaos' to which faction contributes, can be resolved and transformed through an act of union which leads to freedom and 'beauty in its fullest light' (*italics added*). This is 'Creation' (II, 42) - the 'light' of 'Creation' as in Genesis.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the rhyme pattern of the last four lines here is admirable: 'free' / 'we', 'light' / 'Unite'. While emphasizing the unity, it also suggests that 'we' will only be creatively ('light') 'free' when we 'Unite'.

And this, in turn, brings us back to Dante and his problems, and particularly to the second line of this Canto, 'When words were things that came to pass'. For, by assuming the role of prophet and aligning himself with the Italians overtly in lines 144/145 of the above passage and making "words things", he demonstrates his profession in lines 17/18: he has forgotten his wrongs in the 'irreparable wrongs' of his 'Country'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the ending of this Canto (II), provides a striking contrast to that of Canto I. By looking out from himself, with a specific and creative message, and uniting himself with the cause of others, he transcends 'the lone rock of desolate Despair' (I, 139). That is to say, the active, the political adaptation of the Word (the use of the Word as a thing), is the axiom of his reconciliation with himself (his mental imprisonment) and with the world.

The end of Canto II takes us directly into the heart of Canto III. Resuming the prophecy, Dante foretells the conquerors and adventurers who will add lustre to the name of Italy. But -

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1. Genesis, I, 3.

2. Both these ideas, 'Unity' and loss of self in 'cause', are re-iterated in Marino Faliero, II, 11, 87/92, by Israel Bertuccio:

We must forget all feelings save the one,  
We must resign all passions save our purpose,  
We must behold no object save our country,  
And only look on Death as beautiful,  
So that the sacrifice ascend to Heaven,  
And draw down Freedom on her evermore. Poetry, IV, 385.

For thee alone they have no arm to save,  
And all thy recompense is in their fame,  
A noble one to them, but not to thee -  
Shall they be glorious, and thou still the same?  
Oh! more than these illustrious far shall be  
The Being - and even yet he may be born -  
The mortal Saviour who shall set thee free ...

III, 48/54

The fame of such men may reflect upon their country but it serves only themselves: it and they are powerless to do anything for the liberty of their country. The 'Being' who devotes himself to the liberty of Italy will be superior to such men because he puts country and cause before self (upper case in 'Saviour' seems to draw attention to the idea of self-sacrifice). These sentiments refer us to the position Dante achieves in Canto II, but they may also remind us of Byron's criticism of the government in his maiden speech: that it was more concerned with its image abroad than with its domestic calamities. The singleness of the 'Being'<sup>1</sup> is an important criterion and

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1. It is conceivable that, in the first instance, Byron may have had Napoleon in mind for this single 'Being'. The lines are suggestive of his admiration for the singleness of his hero, and, as Lady Blessington records:

Byron is fond of talking of Napoleon; and told me that his admiration of him had much increased since he had been in Italy, and witnessed the stupendous works he had planned and executed. 'To pass through Italy without thinking of Napoleon, (said he,) is like visiting Naples without looking at Vesuvius.'

Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron, edited by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton, New Jersey, 1969), p. 120.

Moreover, Bolton King writes that 'Napoleon is the founder of modern Italy':

Italy was the only country where Napoleon intentionally encouraged the spirit of nationality ... he foresaw that unity of manners and language and literature was bound sooner or later to make a single nation of Italy.

A History of Italian Unity. Bolton King, 2 Vols. (London, 1899), I, p. 2.

I say 'in the first instance' because clearly, at the time of Byron's writing, Italy had still to be united; so that Napoleon may have contributed to the unification of Italy, but can hardly be seen as the 'Saviour' who would set her free. Nonetheless, consciously or unconsciously, Byron's own message to the Italians follows the encouragement Napoleon gave them, and what Napoleon 'foresaw'.

takes us back by way of Byron's admiration for the singleness of Napoleon, to a passage in his Journal for 1813/14:

To be the first man - not the Dictator - not the Sylla, but the Washington or the Aristides - the leader in talent and truth - is next to the Divinity! Franklin, Penn, and, next to these, either Brutus or Cassius - even Mirabeau - or St. Just.<sup>1</sup>

Poetically, such a figure, 'the leader in talent and truth', is what Dante seems to be suggesting here: one who is free of party and egoism, and is dedicated to ushering in the 'moral morn' (III, 58, italics added) of freedom.

However, in the absence of such a 'Saviour' and set against the 'Conquerors on foreign shores' (46) and 'Discoverers of new worlds' (47), Dante foretells the poets who will follow his example in making Italy 'Europe's Nightingale of Song' (II, 29). And here again, he turns to the authority of the Word:

Yet through this centuried eclipse of woe  
Some voices shall be heard, and Earth shall listen;  
Poets shall follow in the path I show,  
And make it broader: the same brilliant sky  
Which cheers the birds to song shall bid them glow,  
And raise their notes as natural and high;  
Tuneful shall be their numbeers; they shall sing  
Many of Love, and some of Liberty,  
But few shall soar upon that Eagle's wing,  
And look in the Sun's face, with Eagle's gaze,  
All free and fearless as the feathered King,  
But fly more near the earth; how many a phrase  
Sublime shall lavished be on some small prince  
In all the prodigality of Praise!  
And language, eloquently false, evince  
The harlotry of Genius, which, like Beauty,  
Too oft forgets its own self-reverence,  
And looks on prostitution as a duty.

III, 62/79

The 'eclipse of woe' in the first line here refers us to the 'doom' of 'darkness', which we saw in the inverted Genesis passage (II, 40/49); and again, the 'notes' which poets will sing are related to the birds and to the brilliance of the Italian 'sky', which refers us to the opening of Canto II (II, 27, 'every word, as brilliant as thy skies'; and II, 29 and 31, 'Europe's Nightingale of Song' and 'The note of meaner birds'), and to its closing passage (II, 143,

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1. LJ. III, 218.

'And show thy beauty in its fullest light', italics added). This re-iterates, then, and underscores, what has already been established: writing as a political act - the nationalistic use of language, and the use of the Word which through itself can transform the 'bloody Chaos' (II, 42) of 'Division', 'Doubt and Discord' (II, 134 and 140) into the creative 'light' of freedom. The idea of freedom is suggested further by the bird imagery in the above passage: poets will 'raise their notes as natural and high' (67). This contrasts splendidly with lines 73/79, where language becomes artificial and untrue ('eloquently false', 76), corrupted and corrupting ('harlotry', 77; 'prostitution', 79), and unfree ('duty', 79, and also 73/75), when it is exploited for selfish ends. The very harshness of the words here, and the grimness of the metaphor, reflect the very perversion of language that is castigated; while the alliterative ps, the indefinite and reductive 'some small prince' (74, italics added), and the cloyed sense of 'lavished' (74) and 'prodigality' (75) in lines 73/75, suggest the contempt for the squandering of such a potent (linguistic) weapon. But the major image, of course, is that of the Eagle (a consistent image of freedom, self-mastery and singleness in the Byron glossary); and it is put to good effect here. For, it embraces what has already been suggested through the bird imagery, but takes it to its highest pitch: 'Many' shall sing 'of Love' (69), and 'some' shall sing 'of Liberty' (69); but 'few' only will dare to champion that 'Liberty' to the utmost, and challenge the very essence of cosmic order, that is, tyranny (notice the change from 'sing' to 'soar' and look' here). Both the wording and the image of these lines are very similar to those of a passage in Cain (1821): 'Souls who dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in/His everlasting face, and tell him that/His evil is not good'.<sup>1</sup> The eagle recalls that which appears to Bonnivard when he looks out of his dungeon,<sup>2</sup> and

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1. Cain, I, 1, 138/140; Poetry, V, 218.

2. The Prisoner of Chillon, 353/355.

to Manfred alone on the Jungfrau;<sup>1</sup> but here, the image of the eagle gazing into the sun finely captures its spirit of power and defiance. Moreover, the singleness of the figure matches the singleness of the 'Being' who will free Italy (III, 52/54).

The 'prostitution' of art is expanded upon in the subsequent lines (80/97), but the focus is on the poet himself. The 'Bard' who is 'too near the throne' (85), is like a captive in chains (82/83); for he is 'bound to please' (86; the pun on 'bound', suggesting both chained and compelled, is surely intentional), and must 'smooth the verse to suit his Sovereign's ease' (88). He is 'trammelled' (92), and 'toils through all, still trembling to be wrong' (93). Once again the words themselves reflect and emphasize the lack of freedom of such a poet. But the criticism that is levelled against him is that by serving 'his Sovereign' he serves time, is partial and does not speak the truth (96/97: 'He sings, as the Athenian spoke, with pebbles/In's mouth, lest Truth should stammer through his strain.'). and so corrupts the creative potential of the Word (88/91).

In contrast to such a poet however, Dante turns to three poets in particular who will not bow to time: Petrarch, Ariosto and Tasso. But, while Petrarch will be hailed 'as the Chief/Of Poet-lovers, and his higher song/Of Freedom wreath him with as green a leaf' (103/105; notice the distinction between the two songs here), Ariosto and Tasso 'will both consume' (150) -

In penury and pain too many a year,  
And, dying in despondency, bequeath  
To the kind World, which scarce will yield a tear,  
A heritage enriching all who breathe  
With the wealth of a genuine Poet's soul,  
And to their country a redoubled wreath,  
Unmatched by time ...

III, 151/157

The irony of the 'penury and pain' they endure in life (and the injustice of the 'World'), and the 'wealth' of the 'heritage' they 'bequeath',

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1. Manfred, I, 11, 29/36.

underlines their self-sacrifice and the value of that sacrifice. For their bequest enriches everyone, universally and eternally ('all who breathe'), and thereby resounds doubly to the name and stature of their country ('a redoubled wreath', because they are two poets who earn the laurel both for themselves and their country - though primarily for their country since they were dead before they were acknowledged; or possibly, because they both 'bequeath' the laurel 'wreath' and the 'wreath' of their graves; or, more likely than not, both alternatives - for they merely serve to underscore each other). The praise (which is praiseworthy itself - the consistency of the poverty/riches imagery, and the peculiarly forceful 'Unmatched by time'), is directed at the utter integrity of these poets who, at the expense of self, their 'body's self turned soul with the intense/Feeling of that which is, and fancy of/That which should be' (163/165), have not denied 'The God within them' (IV, 5); neither self nor the expediencies of time has prevented their dedication to the truth and creative power of the Word.

And 'Is this the whole/Of such men's destiny beneath the Sun?', Dante questions (159/160). 'Yes, and it must be', he answers himself (167):

For, formed of far too penetrable stuff,  
These birds of Paradise but long to flee  
Back to their native mansion, soon they find  
Earth's mists with their pure pinions not agree,  
And die or are degraded; for the mind  
Succumbs to long infection, and despair,  
And vulture Passions flying close behind,  
Await the moment to assail and tear;  
And when, at length, the winged wanderers stoop,  
Then is the Prey-birds' triumph, then they share  
The spoil, o'erpowered at length by one fell swoop.

III, 168/178

This is good, except for the rather clumsy last two lines (they continue the idea of being pursued by the Furies, the 'vulture Passions', well enough, but the syntax is awkward: the 'they' refers to the 'Prey-birds', yet the 'o'erpowered at length by one fell swoop' refers to the 'birds of Paradise', the poets). However, the bird imagery is splendidly consistent; and 'vulture Passions' draw our attention to the Promethean stature of the poet (already

suggested by the shipwrecked sailor image (l, 139, 'On the lone rock of desolate Despair'), and which recurs in Canto IV. Coleridge suggests we compare these 'birds of Paradise' with the closing two lines of Kubla Khan.<sup>1</sup> There may be something in the comparison - the ostracized or alienated poet - but there is nothing to suggest the 'holy dread', which the poet in that poem inspires, in the present lines. Indeed, the image here is of the poet's fragility ('too penetrable stuff'), which suggests his spirituality; thus the phrase, these 'birds of Paradise', refers us to the more pertinent image of the bird which Bonnivard thinks is his dead brother, come as a 'visitant from Paradise'.<sup>2</sup> In effect though, the whole passage returns us to Byron's expressions in Childe Harold III, 73/74, where he looks upon life as 'on a place of agony and strife,/Where, for some sin, to Sorrow I was cast,/To act and suffer, but remount at last/With a fresh pinion';<sup>3</sup> and where he yearns for the time 'when, at length, the mind shall be all free' and he is a 'bodiless thought', a 'Spirit of each spot'.<sup>4</sup>

However, Dante goes on to suggest that there are poets of another order, and significantly he includes himself among them:

Yet some have been untouched who learned to bear,  
Some whom no Power could ever force to droop,  
Who could resist themselves even, hardest care!  
And task most hopeless; but some such have been,  
And if my name amongst the number were,  
That Destiny austere, and yet serene,  
Were prouder than more dazzling fame unblessed;  
The Alp's snow summit nearer heaven is seen  
Than the Volcano's fierce eruptive crest,  
Whose splendour from the black abyss is flung,  
While the scorched mountain, from whose burning breast  
A temporary torturing flame is wrung,  
Shines for a night of terror, then repels  
Its fire back to the Hell from whence it sprung,  
The Hell which in its entrails ever dwells.

III, 180/193

1. Poetry. IV, 267n.
2. The Prisoner of Chillon. 284; cf. also, The Island, II, xv.
3. CHP. III, 73.
4. CHP. III, 74.

This is a positive statement of Dante's reconciliation with his 'Destiny', and of his freedom from mental imprisonment; and the poetry expresses his accomplishment perfectly. The bland and brief one-line statement of line 187, and the image of the firm Alp reaching into heaven, reflect the austerity as well as the serenity of his position: the 'snow' on the summit suggests a degree of detachment, not passionless necessarily but self-controlled. Dante is not entrenched in self but master of self, and that is why his 'Destiny' is both 'austere' and 'serene': the very self-discipline gives him his serenity. And he is 'prouder' of this achievement because it has been the 'hardest care' and 'task most hopeless', yet he has been able to 'resist' himself.

And the volcano image splendidly reflects the old position he now renounces. The seven-line outburst, with its images of heat, fire, night and 'Hell', captures the tormented passion and self-destruction of unbridled (uncontrolled) energy. This will remind us of much that has gone before; in particular, lines 130/152 of the opening Canto, the situation of Tasso still lamenting in his prison, and most strikingly of Childe Harold III, 42/44. But it also recalls one of Byron's early definitions of poetry. In a letter to Annabella Milbanke,<sup>1</sup> he writes that poetry 'is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earth-quake'. The suggestion is then, that Dante is also distinguishing between two forms of poetry. The one being the mere personal expression of unbridled passion, whose aim of catharsis lasts only so long as the outburst itself (hence lines 191/193 in the above passage); the other being more objective expression, that stands in austere serenity above and beyond the passions. And amongst this latter class we can place Dante and his prophecy as an example: through the control and objectivity of his prophecy, and the Promethean aspect of his political 'message' (freedom), he reveals his active (participatory) function as poet and the strictly creative use of the Word.

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1. November 29, 1813, LJ. III, 179.



Having reached this satisfactory position (which is, in essence, also the conclusion of this chapter), it would be tempting to stop here. But there is another Canto to go; and though it will not be dealt with in such detail, since it repeats much of what has already arisen, some comment is required and indeed is necessary, if only because of the conflict of opinion concerning it. Drummond Bone sees it as a 'retreat from the futility of action into the inviolate world of the self';<sup>1</sup> while Chester Mills ends his article, 'We must imagine Byron happy'.<sup>2</sup>

Canto IV opens with a discussion as to who is a poet and what is poetry:

Many are Poets who have never penned  
 Their inspiration, and perchance the best;  
 They felt, and loved, and died, but would not lend  
 Their thoughts to meaner beings; they compressed  
 The God within them, and rejoined the stars  
 Unlaurelled upon earth, but far more blessed  
 Than those who are degraded by the jars  
 Of Passion, and of their frailties linked to fame,  
 Conquerors of high renown, but full of scars.  
 Many are Poets but without the name;  
 For what is Poesy but to create  
 From overfeeling Good or Ill; and aim  
 At an external life beyond our fate,  
 And be the new Prometheus of new men,  
 Bestowing fire from Heaven, and then, too late,  
 Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain,  
 And vultures to the heart of the bestower,  
 Who, having lavished his high gift in vain,  
 Lies chained to his lone rock by the sea-shore?  
 So be it: we can bear. - But thus all they  
 Whose Intellect is an o'ermastering Power  
 Which still recoils from its encumbering clay  
 Or lightens it to spirit, whatsoe'er  
 The form which their creations may essay,  
 Are bards ...

IV, 1/25

There is an anomaly at the outset here: the idea in the first nine lines is intelligible and perhaps fair enough, if taken by itself; but it is totally at variance with the rest of the passage. For, if such men 'would not lend/Their thoughts to meaner beings', but 'compressed/The God within them,'

1. 'Political Choices: The Prophecy of Dante and Werner'. Byron: Poetry and Politics, edited by Edwin A. Stürzl and James Hogg. (Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Salzburg, 1981), p. 159.
2. 'The Prophecy of Dante'. The Byron Journal (1980), p. 59.

they cannot be 'Poets' when the essence of 'Poesy', as the passage goes on to say, is 'to create' and to 'be the new Prometheus of new men,/Bestowing fire from Heaven' (*italics added*). The whole point of 'Poesy' is that the 'God within' is not 'compressed', but takes a certain 'form' (24) which is given to men. Besides, the description in lines 3/6 could be applied to anyone. So these first nine lines are awkward and, in context, superfluous.

Lines 11/13 however, recall the opening both of The Lament of Tasso (19/24, and 33/41) and the present poem (I, 1/12), and Byron's assertions in Childe Harold III and IV.<sup>1</sup> In these cases the motive is selfish though, and the above three lines would also be so were they not immediately succeeded by the Promethean image. For this image takes us back to the opening of Canto II of the present poem (particularly lines 2 and 23/29, and to Manfred's desire to make his mind the 'enlightener of nations',<sup>2</sup> both such references thus underscoring the generosity and positive nature of the image. The 'vultures', though, and the image of the Poet/Prometheus 'chained to his lone rock by the sea-shore', refer us to the more negative idea of Prometheus raised in Canto I, 139, and Canto III, 168/178. Yet, the whole of this sentence is cast in the form of a rhetorical question; and Dante only re-iterates his achievement of austere serenity (reached at the conclusion to the preceding Canto, III, 180/193), in the emphatic monosyllables of line 20: 'So be it: we can bear'. Besides, the remaining half of this line 20, with its impatient 'But', suggests that Byron is eager to leave subjects already discussed, and to get on to the main issue he wants to argue here: which is that 'Poesy' is not restricted to poets or poetry in its 'penned' form, but embraces Sculptors, Painters and Architects (hence lines 23/25). Here Byron is on firmer, unequivocal ground; but, although his argument is persuasive and generous, he adds little to what has already been expressed in the previous Cantos. In particular, he contrasts

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1. CHP. III, 6, and CHP. IV, 5.

2. Manfred, III, 1, 107.

the temporary power of kings and the unfreedom of those who work for them,  
with the immortality of Art, and those artists who, though penurious, work for  
their country and are therefore free:

Who toils for nations may be poor indeed,  
But free; who sweats for Monarchs is no more  
Than the gilt Chamberlain, who, clothed and feed,  
Stands sleek and slavish, bowing at his door.  
Oh, Power that rulest and inspirest! how  
Is it that they on earth, whose earthly power  
Is likest thine in heaven in outward show,  
Least like to thee in attributes divine,  
Tread on the universal necks that bow,  
And then assure us that their rights are thine?  
And how is it that they, the Sons of Fame,  
Whose inspiration seems to them to shine  
From high, they whom the nations ofttest name,  
Must pass their days in penury and pain,  
Or step to grandeur through the paths of shame,  
And wear a deeper brand and gaudier chain?

IV, 91/106

In the first four lines, 'nations' is carefully balanced against  
'Monarchs', so that the former carries the concept of the permanent spirit of  
a country, while the latter carries that of the time-bound power of a king.  
And the language, 'sweats', 'sleek', 'slavish', bears the weight both of the  
contempt for, and the bondage of, those who do self-seekingly work for 'Monarchs'.  
It denotes, despite his apparent welfare ('gilt', 'clothed and feed'), the  
actual spiritual impoverishment of the 'Chamberlain'. The ideas of mere appear-  
ances and bondage are picked up again in the final two lines above: 'gaudier  
chain' admirably suggesting both the 'chain' of office, which is at the same  
time the 'chain' of his bondage, and its merely colourful, superficial but not  
actual value as an article of 'grandeur'. All this prepares us for the central  
contrast between Poets and kings. Kings have the 'outward show' of God's  
power, but not its 'divine' quality since they use it to tyrannize over men.  
Poets, 'the Sons of Fame' (and the phrase seems to suggest the Sons of God),  
who are inspired by God and have 'divine' qualities inwardly ('spiritus'), and  
who are loved by 'nations', nonetheless must endure a life of deprivation  
('penury and pain' repeat exactly III, 151.) This Job-like appeal, which

seems to prefigure the metaphysics of Cain, is rhetorical, and the question it raises remains unresolved. But the suggestion clearly is that Poets are superior to kings. And the feeling this perhaps disposes Dante to deliver his long apostrophe to Florence in the succeeding lines (111/146). For these lines represent a vast expansion on the theme of lines 95/104 above, with Dante as the Poet/Prophet pitting himself against the tyranny of Florence. He prophesies that the 'vengeance' of his 'verse' (112) will outlive Florence's 'pride', 'wealth', 'freedom' (116) and most of all 'The most infernal of all evils here,/The sway of petty tyrants in a state' (117/118). This last issue, which he continues to develop in extremely vigorous language in lines 119/127 and ending with 'The faction Chief is but the Sultan's brother' (127), tacitly returns us to the call for unification at the close of Canto II. So while the passage might be seen as a personal complaint, the criticism more importantly carries its political message.

When Dante turns to consider his present position as exile from Florence (128/146), there is on the face of it a regression to the earlier miseries of isolation and imprisonment. He is a 'lone spirit' (128), a 'captive toiling at escape' (129), 'an exile, saddest of all prisoners,/Who has the whole world for a dungeon strong' (131/132); and he prophesies that Florence will honour him when he is dead, even though he was an exemplary citizen when living. This seems to return us to Tasso, or the close of Canto I. But, the passage is extraordinarily free of bitter metaphor, its extreme enjambment lends to its being read quickly, and it ends on what seems to be an emphatically final note: 'And for this thou hast warred with me. - 'Tis done' (146). This passage then seems to be a re-statement, a recapitulation of his personal position which is made here in order to secure more forcefully the issue in the closing lines of the Canto:

I may not overleap the eternal bar  
Built up between us, and will die alone,  
Beholding with the dark eye of a Seer  
The evil days to gifted souls foreshown,  
Foretelling them to those who will not hear;  
As in the old time, till the hour be come  
When Truth shall strike their eyes through many a tear,  
And make them own the Prophet in his tomb.

IV, 147/154

This is a statement of intent which, in its austere serenity takes us back to the close of Canto III. Recognizing the futility of trying to 'overleap the eternal bar' that exists between himself and Florence, Dante reaffirms his established role as 'Prophet' not bound by time, who will continue to prophesy what is true in Promethean disregard for self. And this idea, that Dante will continue to prophesy and has more to prophesy, brings us to an important point concerning the poem as a whole. For it does not seem to have been adequately recognized that The Prophecy of Dante is unfinished, and should therefore be considered as a fragment. Writing to Murray, and enclosing 'Dante's Prophecy - Vision - or what not', Byron goes on to say: 'These are but the four first cantos - if approved I will go on like Isaiah'.<sup>1</sup> And in two subsequent letters to Murray, he re-iterates that they are the '4 first Cantos'.<sup>2</sup> This bears significantly on the poem as we have it. For, not only does it emphasize the continuing prophetic role of Dante in the above last lines of the Canto, but it also suggests that the discussion just preceding those lines, which at first concerns Tyrants and poets generally and then develops into the personal example of Florence and Dante (Canto IV, 111/146), may have been so located as part of a strategic poetical device. It suggests that Byron was perhaps working within a structure that oscillates intentionally between the personal considerations of Dante and his public role as 'Prophet', in order to underline the significance of the role and the necessity of political choice.

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1. March 14, 1820. LJ. VII, 57

2. March 20, 1820 and March 23, 1820. LJ. VII, 58, 59.

But, Byron's breaking off just here and failing to resume the poem, have further implications. After the failure of the Italian uprising in February 1821 (so poignantly recorded in his Ravenna Journal,<sup>1</sup>) Byron wrote to Hoppner who had queried his continuing with The Prophecy of Dante: 'Continue it! - Alas! what could Dante himself now prophesy about Italy?'<sup>2</sup> And to Medwin, during their conversations at Pisa in 1821/1822, he said: 'It was the turn political affairs took that made me relinquish the work. At one time the flame was expected to break out all over Italy, but it only ended in smoke, and my poem went out with it.'<sup>3</sup> This serves to underscore the overtly political nature of the poem - as an outright incitement or encouragement to the Italians; but it also suggests Byron's dissatisfaction with merely verbal political activism. It seems to qualify the absolute power of the Word.

Nonetheless, from our reading of The Prophecy of Dante, it would seem that the political use of the Word does constitute a movement away from self - a relative redemption of self from self through the chosen mediatory role of 'Prophet'. Where The Prisoner of Chillon establishes the position of mental endurance; and where The Lament of Tasso, while re-affirming that position, attempts unsuccessfully to re-engage with life, The Prophecy of Dante takes up Tasso's 'innate force',<sup>4</sup> and channels it into Dante's 'prophetic' commitment to action. Such redemption, however, as far as Byron is concerned, is only relative for he is still proposing the issue poetically; writing politically is not the same as doing politically. Although the Word has become creatively active, Byron himself must be active, not in the role of 'Prophet', but in the role (and 'role' is an important factor in the development) of active participator in life, here and now. And, as the next chapter hopes to illustrate, only the commitment to action, the shift from the Word to the Deed, can provide the forum for absolute redemption.

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1. LJ. VIII, 49.

2. May 31, 1821, LJ. VIII, 130.

3. Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron, edited by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton, New Jersey, 1966), p. 160.

4. The Lament of Tasso, 45.

## CHAPTER 5

### POET INTO ACTION

'The child dreams and babbles; the man does.'<sup>1</sup>

In the opening chapter we saw a tension between the withdrawn world of poetry and the social world of action. The aim in this chapter is to give a firmer outline to that tension, and against such a background to discuss the poem 'On this Day' in the context of a political choice. For, in many of Byron's major poems we are presented with two distinct and opposing worlds of experience, and often our focus of attention is shifted abruptly from the one to the other. In Don Juan, for instance, we move from the love world of Julia to the shipwreck episode; from the love world of Haidee to the slave ship; from the love world of the Harem and Gulbeyaz to the Siege of Ismail. Always, it seems, from a world of idyll, retirement, love and pleasure to one of hardship, struggle or war. For convenience, we will call these two worlds respectively that of pleasure and that of action. Noticeably, the former world (that of pleasure) is dominated by women, whereas the latter world (that of action) is almost exclusively masculine. That a man's true realm of being is in this latter world - that love is secondary to the other occupations a man should pursue, is suggested by Julia in her letter:

Man's love is of his life a thing apart,  
'Tis woman's whole existence. Man may range  
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart;  
Sword, gown, gain, glory offer in exchange  
Pride, fame, ambition to fill up his heart,  
And few there are whom these cannot estrange.  
Man has all these resources, we but one,  
To mourn alone the love which has undone.<sup>2</sup>

Again, more symbolically, this point is made by Juan's being forced to wear

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1. George Steiner, Language and Silence (Harmondsworth, 1969), p.70.
  2. DJ. I, 194. The very enumeration here underlines the variety of activities accessible to a man, and the single resource of 'love' that a woman has. Cf. DJ. II, 199.

'effeminate garb',<sup>1</sup> and trick himself out as a woman in order to be smuggled into the presence of Gulbeyaz and gain access to the Harem.<sup>2</sup> That is, by being absorbed into the pleasure world Juan becomes woman-like, effeminate, and sheds his proper masculine role. Not only does the change of clothes suggest this change of role, but also Juan's bursting into tears when Gulbeyaz asks him 'canst thou love?'.<sup>3</sup> Or again, in Canto III, stanza 77, where Juan is dressed in a 'shawl' and 'turban' and is wearing an 'aigrette', cunningly referred to as a 'glowing crescent'. The irony is that Juan, a Catholic, has turned Turk and is rigged out as a Moslem ('turban', 'crescent'). The implied criticism here is rather more dire than his being merely 'effeminate': he has lost his integrity. Love has led to apostasy - more than a venal sin in the Byron catechism.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in the pleasure world Juan plays a passive part - not merely sexually, but authoritatively. He is under the control of others: Julia, Haidée, Gulbeyaz and Catherine have power over him. In the world of action, however, he is to some extent in a position of control: for example, in the shipwreck episode he guards the 'spirit house' and urges the crew not to 'die drunk',<sup>5</sup> or again, in the Siege of Ismail, he leads the assault,<sup>6</sup> and saves the little girl Leila at the risk of his own safety.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that in his proper masculine sphere he still retains, despite other deprivations, a measure of independence and personal freedom. Certainly this is only a relative freedom, but it is greater than that enjoyed in the world of pleasure. This is perhaps emphasized by the very scenes of the pleasure world: Seville, an Island, a Harem - each isolated, remote or otherwise cut off from the great world - a world where things other than love and pleasure take place.

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1. DJ. V, 76.

2. DJ. V. 73/80.

3. DJ. V, 116/117.

4. Compare for example, Byron's Journal entry for November 30, 1813.  
LJ. III, 227.

5. DJ. II, 35/36.

6. DJ. VII, 62/63.

7. DJ. VIII, 95/102.



This last point lends to the impression that Juan would remain trapped in the world of pleasure were it not for some external agency to jolt him out of it. Alfonso's discovery throws him out of the love world of Julia; Lambro throws him out of his Haidee idyll; Gulbeyaz's frustration and jealousy throw him out of his Harem extravaganza. In each case some kinetic force throws him back onto his own resources - he is thrust into a world where he has to act for himself. Without such a force, Juan would lose himself, literally and figuratively, in a false and limited world of sensuality, self-indulgence, selfishness, vanity and inaction - a world of stasis. He only asserts himself when he becomes dynamically involved in the world of action.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the trap of the pleasure world and the necessity of an outside agency to extricate Juan from that trap, are suggested clearly in the following lines:

And he could even withstand that awkward test  
Which Rousseau points out to the dubious fair,  
'Observe your lover when he leaves your arms';  
But Juan never left them while they had charms,

Unless compelled by fate or wave or wind  
Or near relations, who are much the same.<sup>2</sup>

The vanity or inward looking nature of the pleasure world, can be seen again in the Julia episode.<sup>3</sup> Alfonso, having withdrawn his 'posse comitatus', is expected to return alone any moment. Yet, despite the crisis, Julia and Juan 'Even then their love they could not all command/ And half forgot their danger and despair.'<sup>4</sup> Their self-absorption prevents them from seeing clearly; they are incapable of confronting their imminent danger realistically and

1. As Elizabeth Boyd has indicated: 'Things happen to him before he can think even once ... Only in moments of extreme danger does he rise to act of his own volition.' Byron's Don Juan. A Critical Study (New Brunswick, 1945), p. 37.
2. DJ. VIII, 53/54. For an earlier example of the trap of the world of pleasure see The Corsair, I, 341/554 (P.W. III, 162/169). In many respects Medora represents an Eve-like figure, luring Conrad from his active path to 'learn the joys of peace' (I, 389). And Conrad knows the power she could have over him, 'He dared not raise to his that deep-blue eye' (I, 468) lest it unman him. As a Chief, he must 'not betray to woman's grief.' (I, 518). Compare also, the potential threat that Neuha offers to Torquil in The Island, II, 529, 'ah, Neuha! now/Unman me not'. (Poetry, V, 617).
3. DJ. I, 169/171.
4. DJ. I, 170.

and rationally. And certainly one of the reasons is that they have lost their self-control: they do not 'command' their love - but rather, they are in love's clutches - love blinds them.<sup>1</sup>

On a larger scale, we can see the same criticism of the pleasure world expressed in Childe Harold Canto I (39-48). In these stanzas, Harold wanders through Spain contemplating and commenting upon the ravages of war. When he gets to Seville, as yet untouched by the war, he has this to say (46):

But all unconscious of the coming doom,  
The feast, the song, the revel here abounds;  
Strange modes of merriment the hours consume,  
Nor bleed these patriots with their country's wounds;  
Nor here War's clarion, but Love's rebeck sounds;  
Here Folly still his votaries enthralls;  
And young-eyed Lewdness walks her midnight rounds;  
Girt with the silent crimes of Capitals,  
Still to the last kind Vice clings to the tott'ring walls.

What is initially presented in the first five lines here as a happy and harmonious scene which war is going to destroy, is undercut by the succeeding four lines which show the scene as being already in a state of corruption. It is a hotbed of 'Folly', 'Lewdness', 'Vice' and 'crimes'. This reflects upon the word 'unconscious' in the first line: the world of pleasure has become so self-engrossed and morally depraved that, like Juan and Julia, it is incapable of clear sightedness - it lacks awareness. The sense of inward-looking self-imprisonment is emphasized by the enclosing words 'enthralls', 'rounds', 'Girt', 'walls', while the moral decay is finely related to the physical collapse of the city's walls. (Notice also the lack of energy or movement implied by the repeated word 'Still'). Here then, is the suggestion that war may be beneficial in so far as it will cleanse the world of pleasure which, having been left to itself, has led to satiety and stasis. The next stanza (47), however, presents a contrast:

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1. A similar tension arises in The Island, II, 298/331. Torquil's former, manly 'soaring spirit' (II, 203) has been 'tamed' down by love and Neuha 'to that voluptuous state,/At once Elysian and effeminate,/Which leaves no laurels o'er the Hero's urn' (II, 312/314). Yet, in this very same verse paragraph, Byron goes on to castigate 'Caesar's deeds and Caesar's fame' (II, 320).

Not so the rustic - with his trembling mate  
He lurks, nor casts his heavy eye afar,  
Lest he should view his vineyard desolate,  
Blasted below the dun hot breath of war.  
No more beneath soft Eve's consenting star  
Fandango twirls his jocund castanet;  
Ah, monarchs! could ye taste the mirth ye mar,  
Not in the toils of Glory would ye fret;  
The hoarse dull drum would sleep, and Man be happy yet!

Here the natural simplicity of both the occupation and the pleasure of the 'rustic' compares with the vulgar sophistication of the city. Moreover, the rustic is alert to the impending doom. Byron seems to indicate that here is a world that has struck a balance between that of action and that of pleasure. The rustic enjoys his pleasure only after his day of husbandry - the striking use of 'consenting' tells us that his enjoyment is well-earned: he combines a life of productivity and pleasure without going to extremes. So Byron's moral point in the final three lines (where he turns to criticize the world of action), refers explicitly to the rustic's 'mirth' rather than to the questionable 'Strange modes of merriment' the city dweller experiences. Indeed, his criticism of 'Monarchs' and their ambition (the world of action), is made the sharper by his juxtaposing them with the rustic (instead of the city dweller), for their life styles are so wholly alien from one another. The use of language contributes to this: 'toils of Glory', 'fret', 'hoarse dull drum' weigh heavily against 'mirth', 'happy', 'jocund', 'soft': Monarchs are destroying a world of innocence.

In these two stanzas then, we seem to have the worlds of action and of pleasure in their extremes; and the criticism is that neither has any moral discrimination. The rustic's life represents an ideal between the two - significantly retaining his clear-sightedness.<sup>1</sup>

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1. One might compare here the stanzas on 'General Boon, the backwoodsman of Kentucky', which are set in the midst of a canto full of blood and slaughter. Byron's sense of timing is superb. DJ, VIII, 61/67.

In the celebrated stanzas on Waterloo in Childe Harold III (21-28),  
Byron again juxtaposes these two worlds (21/22):

There was a sound of revelry by night,  
And Belgium's capital had gathered then  
Her Beauty and her Chivalry, and bright  
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men;  
A thousand hearts beat happily; and when  
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,  
Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,  
And all went merry as a marriage-bell;  
But hush! hark! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!

Did ye not hear it? - No; 'twas but the wind,  
Or the car rattling o'er the stony street;  
On with the dance! let joy be unconfined;  
No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet  
To chase the glowing Hours with flying feet -  
But, hark! - that heavy sound breaks in once more,  
As if the clouds its echo would repeat;  
And nearer, clearer, deadlier than before!  
Arm! Arm! and out - it is - the cannon's opening roar!

The aural imagery is used to great effect here: the 'sound of revelry', music's 'voluptuous swell', the 'marriage bell' and even the hearts that 'beat' in unison convey the harmony and delight of the bright scene of pleasure depicted; while the 'rising knell', the 'heavy sound', and 'the cannon's opening roar' likewise suggest the discordancy of the world of action that 'breaks' in upon, 'strikes' at, and shatters that harmonious world. And the rhythm of the verse enacts both this harmony and discord: notice, for instance, the enjambment and easy flow of the first eight lines of stanza 21 (echoed in lines 3-5 in stanza 22) and the slow, heavily stressed rhythm of the ninth line. Then again, the halting, almost syncopated rhythm of much of stanza 22 - particularly the final line, which serves to suggest the fragmentation and destruction war is bringing. Quite clearly, Byron juxtaposes these two worlds in order to emphasize the life-negating nature of war: war destroys a world of 'Beauty' and 'Chivalry', of 'pride', 'joy', 'Youth' and 'Pleasure' a world of 'lusty life'.<sup>1</sup> All the furious activity in stanzas 24-25 prior to the battle itself, is one of pandemonium: a chaotic 'mustering', 'mounting', and 'pouring forth' (the

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1. CHP. III, 28.

participles and gerunds underline the sudden activity) of a wild, and almost irrational nature takes place. War is an aberration.

Nevertheless, Byron does seem to criticize at the same time the very world which war is going to destroy. Despite the obvious attraction of the world of pleasure here, it is not without its self-indulgence and 'unconscious' mentality; witness the refusal to recognize the 'knell' for what it really is and to perpetuate the enjoyment although the alarm has been given. This is picked up again in the next stanza,<sup>1</sup> where the Duke of Brunswick's awareness and warning is derided and goes unheeded - 'they smiled because he deem'd it near' (line 5). Even such a beautiful line as 'Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,' suggests the inward looking nature of that world, in a similar way as the Juan and Julia self-absorption noted above. It seems harsh to interpret these 'mutual eyes'<sup>2</sup> so unkindly, for the idea perfectly expresses the beauty and intensity of love - which is what Byron is also saying. Yet the context suggests that the criticism is there too. Besides, there is a curious irony that such a ball, celebrating love and peace, should be taking place the evening prior to the battle which is to wreck that love and peace. Of course, this shows up the destructive work of war again; but it also adds to the blindness of the world of pleasure.

The juxtaposition of the two worlds is most dramatically condensed in stanza 28:

Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,  
Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay,  
The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,  
The morn the marshalling in arms, - the day  
Battle's magnificently stern array!  
The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which when rent  
The earth is covered thick with other clay,  
Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,  
Rider and horse, - friend, foe, - in one red burial blent.

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1. CHP. III, 23.

2. CHP. III, 24.

This is really excellent. The economy and rapidity with which Byron moves through the stanza not only captures all the hurry from the world of pleasure to the world of action, but also serves to emphasize the contrast between them. All the splendour and vigour in the first five lines is countered by the horror and destruction in the final four, where everything is reduced to 'clay'. It is a perfectly balanced verse, intensifying the irony and bathos of war. Yet Byron is also illustrating the difference between the appearance and reality of war. What is initially presented as attractive in the world of action, in the splendidly disciplined four-word line 'Battle's magnificently stern array' (italics added), is undercut by the stark reality of the final line, where no distinction is drawn between the 'Rider' and 'horse', or the 'friend' and the 'foe'. The 'thunder-clouds' can thus be seen as the veil of illusion which, when stripped apart ('rent'), reveals the true nature of that apparently enticing world. What appears to be 'Battle's magnificently stern array' is, in effect, the squalid and indiscriminate squandering of life. Such a perception only serves to increase Byron's scepticism as to the significance of action, and to re-inforce his dilemma of choice.

Sardanapalus<sup>1</sup> provides the most conspicuous shift from the effeminate world of pleasure to the masculine world of action. Indeed, the movement is fundamental in the structure of the drama.<sup>2</sup> Here, the effeminate King - whose rule of undisciplined sensuality has precipitated his country into a state of cloyed and slothful peace, which in turn has bred discontent, restlessness, insubordination and finally rebellion - leaves the world of pleasure (with the same alacrity as the Duke of Brunswick in Childe Harold III, 23), to re-assert himself in the world of action. In so doing, he is regarded as having returned

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1. Poetry, V.

2. Chew was perhaps the first in this century to note that Sardanapalus represents the 'personification of the struggle of the two natures within man.' The Dramas of Lord Byron (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 113.

to his proper masculine sphere. Myrrha's exclamation on his transformation is emphatic in this respect - 'How I do love thee! ... now I know thee.'<sup>1</sup> By moving into the world of action, he becomes a man worthy to be loved because his male role - his masculinity - is at last distinct and defined, and a King worthy to be followed because he resumes the responsibilities and qualities which his role as King demands of him. In both cases, self-mastery is the cardinal virtue: in the one he masters his passion or weakness for pleasure;<sup>2</sup> in the other, the King overcomes the man in himself - in the manner of the epigraph to The Two Foscari: 'The father softens, but the governor's resolved'.<sup>3</sup> Altada's remark that Sardanapalus fights 'Like a King',<sup>4</sup> and Sardanapalus' own calling for water rather than wine,<sup>5</sup> indicates his self-mastery in his role of King and his rejection of the pleasure world. The change in language in Act III, 1, at lines 98/99, from langour and lethargy to vitality and energy corroborates this. The nature of the pleasure world is perfectly characterized by the last thing Sardanapalus does before going out to battle - look at himself in a mirror.<sup>6</sup> Byron's comment to Murray on this detail as something 'natural in an effeminate character', draws attention to the connection between effeminacy, vanity, self-indulgence and inward-lookingness of that world.<sup>7</sup> Salemenes, who is in many respects the Byronic commentator, makes a pretty speech to Sardanapalus on the 'despotism of vice' - its 'apathy', 'weakness', 'negligence', 'sloth' - which is as much a 'tyranny' as that of 'blood and chains', or indeed worse - for it breeds petty tyranny and 'cruelty' which

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1. Sardanapalus, III, 1, 108, 109.
  2. One is reminded here perhaps of Byron's entry in his Journal for 1813/14: 'I will not be the slave of any appetite.' LJ, III, 212.
  3. Poetry, V, p. 113.
  4. Sardanapalus, III, 1, 200.
  5. Ibid., III, 1, 345.
  6. Ibid., III, 1, 145 and 163.
  7. To John Murray, May 31, 1821, LJ, VIII, 128.

surpass the 'worst acts of one energetic master.'<sup>1</sup>. We may also remember that Sardanapalus himself confesses later on in the drama that 'all passions in excess are female.'<sup>2</sup>. Again, it is an external kinetic force, in the form of the conspiracy of Beleses and Arbaces, that induces Sardanapalus to action.

It seems fair to say then that neither the world of pleasure nor that of action earns Byron's absolute or unqualified approval: he censures both, yet to some extent is attracted to both. This is confirmed in his prose as much as in the poetry. For example, writing to E. N. Long on May 1st, 1807, he makes his objections to military service quite clear:

I am truly sorry the duties of your profession call you to combat, for what? Can you tell me? The ambition of Despotism or the caprice of men placed by chance in the Situation of Governors, & probably inferior to yourself & many more ... you know ... I am no coward, nor would I shrink from Danger on a proper occasion, indeed Life has too little valuable for me, to make Death horrible; I am not insensible to Glory, & even hope before I am at Rest, to see some service in a military Capacity, yet I cannot conquer my repugnance to a Life absolutely & exclusively devoted to Carnage, or bestow any appellation in my Idea applicable to a mercenary soldier, but the Slave of Blood.<sup>3</sup>

The loss of personal freedom is twofold here: subservience to the 'ambition' or 'caprice' of others, and submission to the morally repulsive perpetration of slaughter ('Slave'). In both cases a regular soldier is a tool, not an autonomous individual exercising his own self-mastery - a compromise which Byron refuses to make. Yet he acknowledges that 'some service in a military Capacity' is the path to 'Glory'.

As for the pleasure world, the whole of his Journal for 1813/14 is the record of a man to whom 'idleness is troublesome'<sup>4</sup>, whose life is 'monotonous,

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1. Sardanapalus, I, 11, 65-81.
  2. Ibid., III, 1, 381.
  3. LJ, I, 117/118.
  4. LJ, III, 243.



and yet desultory',<sup>1</sup> and who, amid a whirl of social life, feels he is frittering his life away;<sup>2</sup>

Last night, party at Landsdowne-house. To-night, party at Lady Charlotte Greville's - deplorable waste of time, and something of temper. Nothing imparted - nothing acquired - talking without ideas - if any thing like thought in my mind, it was not on the subjects on which we were gabbling. Heigho! - and in this way half London pass what is called life. To-morrow there is Lady Heathcote's - shall I go? yes - to punish myself for not having a pursuit.<sup>3</sup>

Byron's own emphasis on 'party' is clearly derogatory - while the emptiness of Society life is plain enough ('deplorable waste of time', 'Nothing imparted - nothing acquired'). Yet he does 'feel the want of society',<sup>4</sup> and feels socially obliged to go to such parties.<sup>5</sup> That he decides to go to Lady Heathcote's to 'punish' himself 'for not having a pursuit', makes it clear that he does not consider being a poet or writing poetry a 'pursuit'. Two further passages from his Journal, which were considered in more detail in chapter 1, underline this view, and are worth repeating here as they indicate what this 'pursuit' should be:

no one should be a rhymers who could be any thing better. And this is what annoys one, to see Scott and Moore, and Campbell and Rogers, who might have all been agents and leaders, now mere spectators. For, though they may have other ostensible avocations, these last are reduced to a secondary consideration.<sup>6</sup>

I do think the preference of writers to agents - the mighty stir made about scribbling and scribes, by themselves and others - a sign of effeminacy, degeneracy, and weakness. Who would write, who had any thing better to do? "Action - action - action" - said Demosthenes: "Actions - actions", I say, and not writing - least of all rhyme. Look at the querulous and monotonous lives of the "genus"; - except Cervantes, Tasso, Dante, Ariosto, Kleist (who were brave and active citizens), Aeschylus, Sophocles, and some other of the antiques also - what a worthless, idle brood it is!<sup>7</sup>

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1. LJ. III, 209.
  2. LJ. III, 237.
  3. LJ. III, 254.
  4. LJ. III, 246.
  5. LJ. III, 252.
  6. LJ. III, 217.
  7. LJ. III, 220/221.

The 'actions' - the pursuits - of 'agents and leaders' are superior to the 'effeminacy, degeneracy, and weakness' of 'scribbling and scribes', whom Byron also regards as 'mere spectators', 'worthless' and 'idle'. And, as was suggested in the first chapter, action is the proper sphere in which a man should occupy himself. The polarity here then, is similar to that so far delineated between the world of pleasure and the world of action; and this brings us to the main point. For, the ambivalence we have noted suggests a dual attitude towards the nature of real life: as a 'spectator' of life, Byron can hold disparate views in his mind simultaneously. That is, as a Poet he can conceptualize the ambivalent totality of real life; but, as a man, faced with an existential choice, he is bewildered - to choose is to compromise. In poetry he is under no compulsion to make choices - as is jocularly shown in the following stanza from Don Juan:

One of the two, according to your choice,  
Woman or wine, you'll have to undergo.  
Both maladies are taxes on our joys;  
But which to choose, I really hardly know,  
And if I had to give a casting voice,  
For both sides I could many reasons show,  
And then decide, without great wrong to either,  
It were much better to have both than neither.<sup>1</sup>

In effect, no choice at all! However, as I hope to show, this poetical double vision is resolved when, and only when, the existential choice is made. For Byron, that supreme moment is when he becomes 'engagé' to the Greek cause. The poem 'On this Day' recapitulates the tension in Byron's mind, whilst also transcending it by endorsing his commitment to action. In a sense, he enacts his own Sardanapalus.

'On this Day' is structured on the same movement we have followed so far - from the world of pleasure to the world of action. The difference is, however, that here we are dealing with a relatively short lyric of a highly personal nature. It can be divided into three sections: stanzas 1-4 -

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1. DJ. IV, 25.

withdrawal, introspective thoughts about himself; stanzas 5-7 - recognition, his awakening to the present and real world around him; stanzas 8-10 - participation, recapitulation and rejection and resolution through commitment. Three stages then - withdrawal, recognition, participation; which perfectly embody the movements from both the world of pleasure to the world of action, and from the role of 'spectator' to that of 'agent'. As was mentioned in the first chapter, McGann has suggested that this poem 'seems to echo deliberately the Anacreon Ode I which B had translated years before -- echoes it to invert it, and to choose martial glory instead of love'.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps emphasized by Byron's very choice of stanzaic form, which is the same as that of Pope's 'Ode on Solitude'. Since Pope chooses withdrawal in that poem, Byron may consciously or unconsciously be echoing it also in order 'to invert it'. However, the short final line is marvellously adapted by Byron to both the moods he presents in his poem. In the first four stanzas, it serves to underscore the sense of the poet being trapped in himself; whereas in the final six stanzas it becomes emphatically resolute, thus reflecting Byron's self-possession and determined engagement with the cause.<sup>2</sup>

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,  
Since others it hath ceased to move;  
Yet though I cannot be beloved,  
Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;  
The flowers and fruits of Love are gone;  
The worm - the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys  
Is lone as some Volcanic Isle;  
No torch is kindled at its blaze  
A funeral pile!

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,  
The exalted portion of the pain  
And power of Love I cannot share,  
But wear the chain.

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1. Letter from Professor McGann, May 24, 1977.
  2. The text is taken from LJ. XI, 11/12.

But 'tis not thus - and 'tis not here  
Such thoughts should shake my Soul, nor now  
Where Glory decks the hero's bier  
Or binds his brow.

The Sword, the Banner, and the Field,  
Glory and Greece around us see!  
The Spartan borne upon his shield  
Was not more free!

Awake (not Greece - she is awake!)  
Awake, my Spirit! think through whom  
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake  
And then strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down  
Unworthy Manhood - unto thee  
Indifferent should the smile or frown  
Of Beauty be.

If thou regret'st thy Youth, why live?  
The land of honourable Death  
Is here! - up to the Field, and give  
Away thy Breath.

Seek out - less often sought than found -  
A Soldier's Grave, for thee the best;  
Then look around, and choose thy Ground,  
And take thy Rest!

In the first stanza, there is a conflict between desire and knowledge: the poet knows that he ought not to persist in loving - that he 'should be unmoved', yet he wishes to continue doing so - 'Still let me love'. The subsequent three stanzas show how false, vain and self-destructive the maintenance of such a futile state of unrequited love proves to be.

The image of the autumnal tree in stanza 2, carries over the time focus of the first stanza: it is 'time', not only because of his age, but also because his love has no 'flowers and fruits' to offer others (or to 'move' others, as in stanza 1), nor any to enjoy himself. His love is barren, withered - uncreative and unproductive (the position echoes that of Tasso in The Lament of Tasso, and of Dante in The Prophecy of Dante, Canto 1). Only the corrosive frustration of unreciprocated love is left to him - a death-in-life. The third stanza develops this idea with more ardour, through the new figure of the 'Volcanic Isle'. His passion ('fire') merely consumes him: though his 'fire' may 'blaze' away, it neither attracts nor stimulates a similar passion in another; nothing is 'kindled' by it - it is as useless as it is self-destroying (a

'funeral pile')<sup>1</sup>. (Incidentally, according to Hamilton Browne, Stromboli did not erupt during the passage from Italy to Cephalonia - much to the disappointment of Byron who had sat up all night to watch it do so.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps he had this in mind when he used the volcanic image here - though of course, the volcano was a consistent image of his for the poetic imagination.<sup>3</sup>)

In stanza 4, the poet reaches his nadir: all the variety and intensity of love is denied him, only his isolation is confirmed. He can neither 'share' with anyone the 'exalted portion' of love, nor, for that very reason, can he himself 'share' in it - in the sense of feel, partake or experience it. Alone, he only feels the weight of love's 'chain' (the opposite of the 'exalted portion' of love), which also chains him to himself - imprisons him in himself.<sup>4</sup>

So, the initial desire to continue loving (to remain in the world of pleasure), only leads the poet into an impasse of self-destructive and ineffectual passionate isolation. The negative tone, the single figures (the tree and volcano), and the focus on the 'I' of the speaker serve to emphasize this.

Stanzas 5 and 6, however, present a dramatic contrast to the foregoing. With a suddenness similar to that in the opening stanza of Childe Harold III, the poet shakes himself out of his morbid reverie into an awareness of what is going on about him. This is the active expression of Tasso's 'innate force'.<sup>5</sup> The tone becomes positive and the language energetic.<sup>6</sup> Byron's own emphases -

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1. Cf. 'The lone rock of desolate despair'. The Prophecy of Dante, I, 139; see also I, 130/142.
  2. 'A Voyage from Leghorn to Cephalonia with Lord Byron.' James Hamilton Browne. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. XXV (January 1834), pp. 56/67. Since this 'was considered singular, as the volcano is supposed to be in constant activity, and always ejecting matter' (p. 61), the non-event may well have impinged upon Byron's memory.
  3. For example, to Annabella Milbanke, November 29, 1813, LJ, III, 179. See also, The Prophecy of Dante, III, 186/193.
  4. One is reminded here of a couplet from the Haldee episode: 'All who joy would win/ Must share it; Happiness was born a twin.' DJ, II, 172. We are also back in the company of Bonnivard, in The Prisoner of Chillon, and Tasso, in The Lament of Tasso.
  5. The Lament of Tasso, 45.
  6. Cf. the similar linguistic change in Sardanapalus, III, 1, 98/99.

'thus', 'here', 'now' (though needless - the caesura and line-endings are emphatic enough) - add import and immediacy to the new direction of thought, which direction is outwards, away from self, and towards the world of action. Here is a context, a particular place and time (the 'here' and 'now' - that is, the present and real world around him), where something more important than himself and his private anguish is taking place. By recognizing the external world, and by engaging with what is actual and possible, the poet releases himself from the tortured self-imprisonment and his yearning for the unattainable which constitute his earlier reflections. This can be seen with great effect in the linguistic change from the first person singular of the first five stanzas to the use of the plural in stanza 6 - 'around us see'. This is the new reading: in former editions the line has read 'around me see'.<sup>1</sup> The change is significant; for, as McGann has suggested, it 'depersonalizes the statement'.<sup>2</sup> That is, in the present context it marks the movement of the poet from his self-centred isolation to the social world of action; he unites with those around him. As we have already seen, in his Journal for 1813/14, Byron had written:

To withdraw myself from myself (oh that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all; and publishing is also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself.<sup>3</sup>

The final stanzas (7-10) of 'On this Day' suggest that this detachment of self from self can only be securely achieved through commitment to action. In these stanzas, the apostrophe to himself (or specifically his 'Spirit') in the second person singular, indicates that some degree of self-objectification has taken place. In stanza 7, Byron imperatively bids his 'Spirit' awake from the self-indulgent state of the first four stanzas. Bernard Blackstone has

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1. Poetry, VII, 86/88.

2. Letter, received from Professor McGann, May 13, 1980.

3. LJ, III, 225.

objected that in order to awake it, Byron 'must hark back to old dynastic arrogances, to his mother's descent from the Kings of Scotland'.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly the image with which Byron presents us is somewhat recondite, and quite plausibly he could be thinking of his own ancestry. But surely the 'whom' and the 'parent lake' simultaneously refer to Greece. He is acknowledging that he owes his spiritual birth to her: Greece is the 'parent' of his 'Spirit', the source of its 'life-blood'. This is far more consistent with the first line of the stanza and with the new reading of the second line in stanza 6. Moreover, Elizabeth Boyd has remarked that it would be 'hard to overestimate the importance of Greece in Byron's life ... Byron really came of age there. The country suited him emotionally, artistically, physically, and its political problems from the start engaged his best thought and his most serious sympathy.'<sup>2</sup> Peter Quennell has also observed that throughout his life Greece 'was to remain associated in Byron's mind with the idea of youth'.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, the final line of the stanza carries the suggestion, besides that of making a clean cut and thrust in action, of striking for his 'home'. By striking for and on behalf of Greece, he at once pays back the debt he owes her for his spiritual birth and re-unites himself with his 'home'. All of which only serves to underscore his commitment to the cause, as a 'son' of Greece ('Sons of the Greeks, arise:'.<sup>4</sup>) Interestingly enough, this stanza provides us with the final image in the poem; the remaining three stanzas are free of any such. This suggests that Byron has deliberately thrown off the harness of the Word and limits himself to the minimum literary effect in order to underline his choice of commitment to action.

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1. Byron: A Survey. p. 168.
  2. Byron's Don Juan. p. 74.
  3. Byron: The Years of Fame (London, 1935), p. 15.
  4. PW, I. 331. Byron never lost his enthusiasm for Riga's song. See for example, Lovell, His Very Self and Voice, p. 502.

The new state to which Byron has awoken his 'Spirit' is one of dynamic self-mastery: 'Tread those reviving passions down'. Such 'passions', which represent self, would obstruct his commitment to action. And 'Unworthy Manhood' suggests, as has been remarked in connection with the world of pleasure in Don Juan and Sardanapalus, that only by mastering himself (and his passions) and moving into the world of action, can he resume his proper masculine role. Morbid regret for the passing of 'Youth', and plausibly also for a misspent 'Youth', must similarly be mastered. Self-indulgence in either passion or nostalgia is effeminate and weak, entrenching the poet deeper in self and preventing his involvement in the world of action. To achieve 'Manhood', the selfish egocentric self must be denied.

There is perhaps some irony that the acceptance of present life and the commitment to action are seen in terms of death. Admittedly there seems to be a suicidal note in this, particularly in the final two stanzas. Certainly Harold Nicolson would take this view since, as we saw in the first chapter, he felt that Byron 'accomplished nothing at Missolonghi except his own suicide; but by that single act of heroism he secured the liberation of Greece.'<sup>1</sup> So too does McGann, though his reasons are more critically astute: 'I think "On this Day" is "suicidal"'. Byron

can't imagine himself except in the role of a hero, and yet he knows, really, that such a role is an imaginative wish, and no way of truly dealing with real political problems. So his way of breaking from the impasse is to imagine his own heroic death in a great public cause -- thereby making an effective public gesture, or rather imagining the only sort of public act which would, for him, be able to have real public consequences. And the amazing thing is that he was right! His death in Greece was a crucial political event in the cause of Greek independence.<sup>2</sup>

Although this has much in common with Harold Nicolson's view, in so far as it emphasizes the importance of the mythos of Byron's death to the Greek cause, the complexities that McGann raises offer a far subtler account as to

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1. Byron: The Last Journey, p. ix; see also, p. 201.

2. Letter received from Professor McGann, May 24, 1977.



the psychology of Byron's approach to real action. Even so, I cannot entirely agree that Byron is merely making 'an effective public gesture', or is 'imagining the only sort of public act which would, for him, be able to have real public consequences.' The poem does not seem to be so contrived a statement as this, nor, despite all appearances, is it so negative. It is a vindication of his choice. Byron is endorsing his commitment to the Greek cause; if it involves his death, then so be it, to cling to life would be dishonourably selfish for it would be to prefer self to the cause.<sup>1</sup> Hence, what is much more significant here is the idea of self-sacrifice, 'up to the Field, and give/Away thy Breath.' (a fine use of line ending and line opening that emphasizes the 'give' and the 'Away'). It is the serving something other than self, the giving of oneself in some great cause that proves the 'honourable Death'.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the death-in-life we noted in the first stanza, this is a sort of life-in-death, and can be regarded in a positive light as the symbolic death of the selfish self: an ultimate denial of self. 'But - let the Greeks but succeed - and I don't care for myself.'<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the poet's achievement of self-denial and service is staged in the precise capacity of a 'Soldier' (a 'Soldier's Grave'). This re-defines him in terms of a 'pursuit', and completes the movement from the role of self-engrossed and indecisive 'spectator' poet to the chosen role of 'agent', integrated and participating in other. By so doing, Byron not only accomplishes his withdrawal of self from self, but gains a new spiritual freedom, after the manner of Goethe:

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1. We saw Byron's criticism of Napoleon for dishonourably clinging to life in chapter 3, in particular in connection with Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte, stanza 11.
  2. Cf. ''tis the cause makes all,/Degrades or hallows courage in its fall.' The Island, IV, 261/262. Poetry, V, 635. Also, 'They never fall who die/In a great cause', Marino Faliero, II, 11, 93/94; but see also, Marino Faliero, II, 11, 87/109 and 181/191. Poetry, IV.
  3. To Douglas Kinnaid, February 21, 1824, LJ, XI, 117. See also, to James Kennedy, March 4, 1824, LJ, XI, 126.

Freedom consists not in refusing to recognize anything above us, but in respecting something which is above us; for, by respecting it, we raise ourselves to it, and, by our very acknowledgement, prove that we bear within ourselves what is higher, and are worthy to be on a level with it.<sup>1</sup>

'On this Day' then, can be seen as Byron's poetic avowal of his commitment to action. By choosing action he confers 'essence' (that is, meaning and purpose) on his own 'existence'. He answers that tragic poet of doubt, Arthur Hugh Clough, twenty-five years before he posed his question: 'Action will furnish belief, but will that belief be the true one?'<sup>2</sup> Yes, says Byron; and proceeds to exemplify Goethe's dictum, 'Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action'.<sup>3</sup> That he did not live long enough to see its consequences is immaterial; Byron's choice is all.

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1. Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann. Trans. John Oxenford (London: 1930), p. 157.
  2. Amours de Voyage, V, 11. Arthur Hugh Clough. Poems. (London Macmillan, 1909.)
  3. Quoted in Sartor Resartus. Thomas Carlyle (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), p. 135.

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